

**WESTERN EYES:**  
THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY;  
*or Fetish?*

JEN AITKEN  
RYAN AMADORE  
JEREMY GREEN

Saturday, April 2nd // Opening Reception // 7pm - 11pm  
April 2nd to April 16th 2011

Jen Aitken, Ryan Amadore and Jeremy Green's new works consider the relations between natural and synthetic materials offering a sincere and obsessive exploration of these resources. All of these sculptural works function as pleasurable objects and loaded symbols with varied aesthetic, material and conceptual concerns; yet sharing a desire for both visceral experience and cerebral expansion.

Jen Aitken lives and works in Toronto. She has recently shown at the Trench Gallery and attended a residency at the Banff Center with Geoffrey Farmer: *Theater of Erosion or I Hate Work that is Not a Play*. She received a BFA from ECUAD in 2010.

Ryan Amadore lives and works in Vancouver. He has recently attended a residency at the Banff Center with Silke Otto-Knapp: *Figure in a Mountain Landscape*. He received a BFA from ECUAD in 2009.

Jeremy Green lives and works in Vancouver. He has recently shown at Clark & Faria and the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, and attended a residency at the Banff Center with Silke Otto-Knapp: *Figure in a Mountain Landscape*. He received a BFA from ECUAD in 2009.



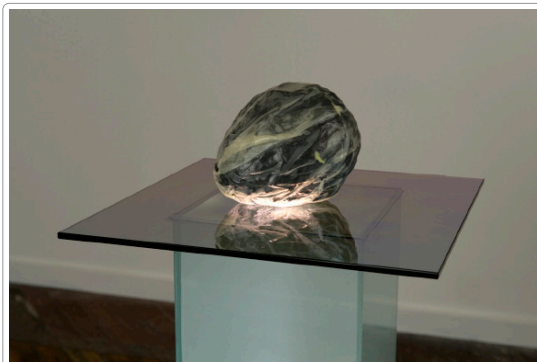
Installation Shot



Installation Shot



Ryan Amadore, *Trees Singing Saw*, Cedar driftwood logs with bark, polyurethane glue, doweling, staples, screws, MDF, speakers, speaker wire, stereo track (with saw songs), wood stool, musical saw and bow (Photo: Scott Massey)



Jeremy Green, *Behemoth*, Acrylic paint, glass plinth and flashlight with battery  
(Photo: Scott Massey)



Jen Aitken, *ottoman*, Fabric, rocks and thread  
(Photo: Scott Massey)

304 Days spoke with Jeremy Green, Jen Aitken and Ryan Amadore before the opening of their exhibition.

**304 Days:** In your recent body of work, you make thin membranes of acrylic paint that you then peel like fruit roll-ups to create layered forms of compressed paint. What is it about this process that excites you and how do you decide on these sculptural forms?

**Jeremy Green:** The ‘fruit roll-up’ process was developed out of a necessity to use paint in a different way that was new and exciting to me. I tried using acrylic and pouring it into cups; using a form based method. But, I found that no matter what, it always had to be really thin for it to work properly. A membrane would solidify on top and then it would be juicy and still wet underneath. So, I kind of developed this process, the fruit rollup process, basically out of an urge to use paint in a more monstrous fashion. When I was in Banff, I was painting monsters, just for fun, because I like monsters and things from pop culture. Movies. Drama. But, they were uninteresting, or at least that was the critique I got when I got back from Banff. I looked at a studio-mate’s painting and realized the method in which she had been painting was quite monstrous. It exhibited these characteristics that I wanted the viewer to feel and so instead of subjectively rendering the monster. I decided to use paint in a way that was monstrous, so that it would exhibit those properties.

Basically, what I realized is that your aesthetic and your own take is what holds you back and so I was urged to try new methods or processes. I tried to destroy everything that I made where my aesthetic would say: “Oh, this looks really good right now, I should probably hold back.” But, I decided to push further and in pushing further I would make mistakes and discoveries that I never would’ve made because I would’ve been too confined by my aesthetic. The form kind of came about initially from wanting to create a universal form, an oval form, like a spherical form. And, I really wanted it to relate to an organ or something of that nature without being so descriptive as it would’ve been so literal and loaded and everybody would’ve got it. I wanted to keep it open ended and I figured the more basic and common the shape, the more it can read as multiple things.

**304 Days:** In *Behemoth*, you have created a plinth of glass to exhibit your paint sculpture that is lit from below by a flashlight. Why have you decided to exhibit the paint sculpture using this method of display?

**JG:** Originally, I had come up with an idea to display the work in the center of a destroyed room. I wanted to create a false wall that looked like it was part of the gallery and then have a hole that looked like it had been eaten through, or something of that nature; where it looked like vermin had burrowed through—this strange and uncomfortable feeling—but, because it had already been covered in another fashion by another artist in this space we decided to do something else. The important part about this display is: How the work interacts with the space? How does it activate the space? And, how does it convey or express what I'm interested in?

I'm interested in mythology and ritual and all that kind of old world stuff. In cinema, film, comics, graphic novels, the sense of drama, conveying a narrative or telling a story. The way I look at my work now—if I can make an analogy—it's as though I am making this recipe and I add this component, but I want these components to signify their own meaning and when they come together. They still have their own meaning, but come together with the other components and make a stronger read. Or, take the work into a direction, that maybe I didn't foresee or that I did foresee. It's open to interpretation.

With the glass plinth, I wanted to convey or exalt the work like an idol, so I was creating something like an altar with idols or things of worship from mythology and all of the different religions of the world. They're usually put in the center of the room, so that they're the most important things that you'll notice in the space. I worked with the curator, Sean, and we both decided it would be best to be in the center of the room because that's part of the work and it's suppose to read like it's very important. The glass is an interesting material because it's sleek, it looks expensive, it looks important and basically it adds another layer to the piece. With the flashlight, I wanted to highlight the piece, but do something different. And, given the kind of ugly or grotesque nature of the paint sculpture on top. I thought lighting it from below would be dramatic and that it would cast a shadow on the ceiling. And, it would just add another layer of storytelling that would allow the viewer to experience the work and let their mind wander in their own imagination.

**304 Days:** You have titled the work *Behemoth* after the mythological beast and it is a term that is also associated with an enormous powerful entity. What is it about this particular reference that interests you and how is this reflected in this work?

**JG:** That's an easy answer because I like mythology and I like monsters. Even though the paint exhibits some monstrous qualities, I felt that I needed an extra kick in that direction. I named it *Behemoth* because: A) its mythological and religious references, and B) it's the name of a beast with insurmountable power. But really, it represents what this new process has done for my practice. It's basically blowing my mind. It's a new 'fruit roll-up' way of making sculptural pieces out of paint. It's opened so many doors in my mind of where this kind of work can go and what can be accomplished. I have more ideas and want to make more of these sculptures and am interested in the many ways to display them. And, to consider what other kinds of themes I want to load them with?

**304 Days:** And, maybe there's something about the Behemoth, this powerful entity sitting on top of the plinth of glass, and that it's almost blocking the light in some ways as though it's a bit of a burden to the light below. Is there something about that that you can talk about?

**JG:** Yeah. There's an eclipse of the light and at the same time it is highlighting it from below and giving it this eerie kind of lighting. And, I think the paint says a lot about what regard I hold for paint. You can make a sculpture out of anything. It's pretty ridiculous thinking about making one with paint because it's so bloody expensive. It's interesting that you mentioned that. That read. When you said: "Yeah, this paint sculpture is blocking out the light." That's creating another element to the read of the work. It's activating a celestial body maybe? When we think of an eclipse we think of the sun and the moon and it makes us think of constellations and it makes us think of those gods from the old world, so I think it fits in nicely.

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**304 Days:** Your piece is using the soft and smooth qualities of fabric in contrast with the unyielding and rough qualities of rock. What is it about this collision of materials that excites you and how do you view their relations?

**Jen Aitken:** I started by using more natural or fashion-like fabrics, and now I've moved into more synthetic ones, I think this one's called 'leatherette.' I've used it in this weird realm, so it's much more removed from fashion for me now. And then pairing it with the rocks seems totally ridiculous, but it's just the classic juxtaposition of hard and soft,

or natural and designed. There is something about those two rocks and that synthetic fabric that just works for me. On one level it's just about being ridiculous, taking something so natural and basic and designing something around it using these costume-y, outlandish materials. But it's not over-the-top, it's just enough so that it works. It's believable. I guess that's the thing. There never is a glorious master plan. I work very intuitively. Not that I am simply messing around, putting things together without thinking, but you could say I've educated my intuition. I'm learning to recognize that certain feeling I get, that I know now from experience means something's working. Now I can just trust it and go with it. So I can't say that anything I say now, in the interview, was in my head while I was making this thing. But when it's done and I feel like it works, then I can start to really think about it. And that doesn't mean that I'm just making things up after the fact to defend the work, but just that this kind of intellectual reading is separate from the making. It's in a different part of the brain—or, it's in the brain, not the body.

With the rocks and the fabric, there's an element of time: a primal one for the rocks and then a degrading or temporary one for the fabric. It's cheap. I have no idea how long it'll last. Making a totally ridiculous cradle around these natural rocks works, I think, because they were already there, and they're from a different method of being. It wouldn't have worked to make the cradle for a designed object, like if there were bowling balls in there, because they're from the same language.

**304 Days:** Your upholstered object encases fairly heavy stones in soft flesh tone recesses of fabric adding a certain amount of tension and weight on the work. How do these recesses and the idea of moving inward work within your sculpture?

**JA:** It's definitely a reference to the body, which is a huge part of all of my work. It's merging that very geometrical form of the half cylinder with these sort of orifices. And with the recesses, I know it's kind of a simple concern, but I'm interested in the base, and what supports what. I really liked the idea of making a base that wasn't flat on the bottom and then to have these things sink into it rather than sit on top. And then it became this sort of rocking cradle. It's sort of halfway in between design and something else. And I really like when things fit together. It's so physically satisfying to put those rocks in there. That might be it for me I think. A lot of it is just about pleasure. Touching and seeing how things are. It's hard for me to imagine the viewer, what it's like to look at the

work without ever having touched it. But I think even just looking at it, you can imagine putting the rocks in and them sinking down.

I find when I'm showing my work to people who aren't in art dialogues, they get really uncomfortable, and they're not sure how to react. But then their responses can be so honest and perfect, and I feel like I've done my job. One girl said to me once: "your work makes me feel like a pervert."

**304 Days:** (Laughs.) Well, you're touching on these pretty suggestive forms to start with; at least in your previous works. And, we're somewhat seduced by the texture of fabrics in general because it has to do with the body and clings to the body and is designed around the body, so there is something already there. When you use these protrusion or recesses there's very much a visceral experience, for sure.

**JA:** So why am I not the pervert? That's interesting. I think maybe it's because you're never sure if I'm trying to be serious or funny. But it's always both.

**304 Days:** I think you're too sincere to be a pervert. You're really involved in what you do, you know what you are doing, so it's hard to believe that it's all just a perverted kind of thing, which is why I really like this work, for example, because it has this quality to it, but it's not hitting you over the head with it. It functions in a more subtle way, but it lures you in and seduces you and once you're there you're thinking: "this is totally perverted, but I love it."

**JA:** Yeah, I think you have to work through those "hitting you over the head" impulses. You've got to get dildos out of your system. I think I've made enough of them now. I'm over it. (Laughs). Shock is still interesting to me though. I try to think of ways I can shock myself, of what I can do so that after I've made something I think "ew, whoa!" And I keep on going, and I have to think, maybe I am a pervert or something. And it goes into a real psychological territory with the compulsive making of these things.

**304 Days:** *ottoman* is a sculpture that makes reference through its title to the piece of furniture that one rests their feet on, implying with it a certain air of luxury and leisure. What is your interest in this device?

**JA:** I think it's more about the service of that object. The focus is not on the person who gets to put their feet up, but it's on the burden of the ottoman having to hold up the person's feet. It's this sort of glorifying of the subordinate—this kind of submissive subject. And, doing it all up in this ridiculous shiny fabric, and having your focus drawn to the sculpture that's low and under. And then even the rocks are under that, and there's this sort of play between who's the lowest? Who's there to serve who? The title *ottoman* is just another reference to the domestic world, or the feminine world. It's a parallel to a kind of general subordinate role. You know, like furniture in comparison to art.

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**304Days:** Your work repurposes old trees that have: drifted to shore, been collected, sawed into firewood lengths, hollowed out, had speakers inserted into them and reconfigured to be used as a tool for your performance/installation. How did this process play out and what is your interest in nature and these resources?

**Ryan Amadore:** I guess it all started when I was at the Banff center. There were piles of logs all over the Banff National Park that you could see all along the pathway and they'd been cut down for interfering with the path and left there to naturally decompose. At least that's what I was told. I kept on walking past these two logs while going to town and I was really attracted to them. I was doing these sound painting contraptions at the time, using sound to create patterns in paint and to me the message was about nature or the natural energy that is around us all the time and that maybe it's shaping the physical in some sort of way, but I didn't like that once I made a painting using that process. The piece became a detached separate thing. It became decorative, like a painting. People seemed to be more interested in the process and the contraption I was using to make them. So, I thought about making some sort of contraption that would be visual and was a symbol relating to that idea of nature, which has a kind of rawness to it. At the time I was also reading a lot of books on Art Povera because I had been referred to Giuseppe Penone and I was inspired by that a bit. I read about how he was interested in natural energy and that's why I think a lot of these Art Povera artists used neon, dirt, actual horses and whatnot. I really like the simplicity of it, so it was a kind of reduction for me. I wanted to find something and alter it slightly to make it into an art piece. I wanted to incorporate the sound too.

While I was in Banff I had a few people, one of them being Kitty Scott, telling me that once an art piece starts to have too much of a function, which these speakers had because I was playing *There is a Light that Never Goes Out* by The Smiths. And, playing tracks like that through it during our open studio visits. I think just the fact that I was playing just anything out of it like any sort of speaker system, with a left and a right, people were offering to buy them right there and then saying: "This would look great in my living room." I liked the attention that it got. And, it was mind blowing in a sense to try this new thing. But, I wanted to amp it up in some way that it could become more than a functional faux-nature design object. With these trees, I thought about going big. It was cool to do that with this piece. It was specifically for 304. Before I even started it that was the idea—to measure it for this ceiling. I also wanted to see how sound would travel through it once it got bigger and I liked the challenge of hollowing it out. At first, I was trying to figure out ways of doing it without having to cut it into blocks like maybe there was a way to magically hollow it out without doing that, but that was just a compromise that I had to do to go through with it. In the end it actually turned out to improve the piece in a big way because it gives it this Frankenstein quality; the glue is visible in some parts where it's broken apart and it slants, but it's kind of resurrected.

**304Days:** I find the sounds, created by the musical saw, that are being played through the trees to be both hypnotic and calming and they recall sounds of alarms, whales or what we would associate with the sounds of ghosts. How do you see the relationship between the sound and the log sculpture?

**RA:** It's interesting. That hypnotic and calming quality—a lot of my art pieces even through out art school were always incorporating sound somehow. I was doing a lot of animations that were based on time-lapse loops and I would always have some sort of sound element to it. But, it was important not to make it too musical in a sense. I didn't want to play just some three-chord progression or some sort of scale or anything. Actually, I did a couple where there was: E, A, D, G, B, E. Or, going through A to G as a whole scale because at the time it was more of a formal way of exploring sound as an art medium. With this, maybe I was a little too literal using the saw in the way that you can tell the trees have visibly been cut and there's a play visually. It's another symbol sort of, just like the trees, but also it's a coincidence in the sense that I had been learning to play the saw over the last year and a half. I like that there is an emo-

tive quality to the sound and there's something kind of sad sounding to it, but it's also kind of comical. I like that it plays on the whole lumberjack/Canadiana thing a little bit too. For the whale sound, it's funny, I was thinking of this driftwood floating in the ocean and how those are probably the things that it would be hearing and I was wondering what it would be hearing? I like that the saw, in the bending and wobbling of it, and how it expresses some sort of idea on balance, which is interesting too.

**304 Days:** Can you talk a little bit about the ghostly qualities of it? I said, "what we hear is what we associate with the sounds of ghosts" and that kind of comes from pop-culture. So, when you're talking about the work as having a bit of a comical element; I think a bit about Scooby-Doo and the sounds that have been made up to sound like ghosts. But, we all understand those sounds.

**RA:** Totally. I think part of the logs floating in the ocean, this driftwood, comes from when I imagine myself in that position. I think what it would be like to be that piece of driftwood floating in the ocean—I know it sounds cheesy (laughs). But, thinking of the fact that you're surrounded by these two abysses: you have the open sky, stars or universe, and then you have this open ocean underneath you. There's something scary about that. Scary. But, also enlightening maybe. Not that I was consciously thinking about these things when I was making this work, but in retrospect, a lot of these things are interesting with regards to the saw, the sound and its relationship to the logs. When I made the first two logs in Banff, I had the hardest time figuring out what sort of sound to play out of them. But, I knew it needed to be a very specific sound to make it into a sound sculpture or an art piece in itself. I feel that in a lot of ways there are a lot of chance elements that came into play with this whole thing, but it kind of fell together.

**304Days:** *Trees Singing Saw* slips between several modes of visual and auditory experience. It starts as a performative work where you, the artist, play the saw, to an installation where the viewer experiences the work as an art object and finally to an interactive work where the viewer becomes participant in playing the saw alongside the musical trees. What excites you about these different experiences or modalities of the work?

**RA:** I like that because it's a stereo track running through the speakers.

And, that the left and right are playing different sounds; a part of the experiment with this piece was to see whether there would be some sort of physical relationship to that sound. A person will physically experience it because of its size—I don't know anybody larger than these trees (laughs). But, I was hoping that maybe the sound coming out of the each speaker would be different and would create some sort of perceptual tweaking or a push and pull, so that it's more based on the sound than what they're actually looking at. I find there's a performative quality in a lot of the work I've been doing. Basically, every single thing that I've been doing over the last few years has had a performative element to it, but I've been avoiding performing and trying to figure out ways around it, so the art piece can maybe speak for itself without having me assist it in its presentation. I think I've kind of gotten over that with this piece and I realize that I'm taking a risk in putting myself outside of my comfort zone to play in front of a crowd of people. I think because I made the sound tracks for the speakers and logs, there will be a relationship to the sounds that are coming out of it and I'm hoping that will create a magical moment. That maybe time will kind of stop while it's happening. Even the way it's lit, I feel like it's going to be a bit of a séance or something with these trees, or a moment for everyone to be quiet and listen. Maybe I'll be overpowering some of the things people are thinking or saying and force them to look.

The other thing I'm not comfortable with is coming off as though I'm narcissistic or egotistical or that I'm begging for this attention. But, without me performing on the opening night there would be something missing. When I'm not here to perform, I hope people will want to pick it up and play. I think that's cool because they're kind of activating it. It's also a challenge to play the saw. It's even more of a challenge to try and play the saw by ear and match the sounds that you're hearing or playing along with it in some way that even if it's not with it, or against it, it's still interesting and the circumstances around the tree continue to change.

Maybe the message in the end, not that there's a finite message, but hopefully it would stay generally the same and it becomes experiential, which is the one thing that ties it all in together. It's interesting looking at the piece and the stool, the saw and bow and how they're all set up in place. Those are things that came together last minute. I made that stool overnight without really having the time to sit with it and find out what my intentions were with it. So, that idea of having this object that be-

comes an invitation in some way for people to come over and sit down and play the saw with the trees is exciting and it was unintentional. But now that I think of it, I like that a lot because I feel there's a kind of constant reminder that parallels some of the concepts behind my ideas of nature. Not that I am for or against, but socially there's this green revolution about saving the world and I don't want to be '*Ferngully*' about it, but there's a temptation in some sense that we all have towards these issues and that fits nicely with the temptation to play, and having the courage to play in front of other people. I don't mean to sound preachy or anything, but it's kind of interesting how those things play out. Maybe it's an allusion of some sort too because the trees are all torn apart and then put back together and even the way the bark has been re-applied; there's something artificial about it. It's natural, but there's something not quite right about it. It's obscured. It's abstract I guess.

One thing about its modalities, there's an element of performance and theatre and all that stuff that we all take part in within the art world. Even being a person at an opening, in some sense, you're playing out the role of the artist or entourage or whoever you are. Curator. Critic. To me it's a playful way of messing around with that a little bit by putting not just myself on the spot, but putting other people on the spot, so they're the performer taking part in the performance or theatre and being even more aware of the fact that you're performing.

# WESTERN EYES: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY; OR FETISH?

Sean Matthew Weisgerber

One morning last year in June, I was woken up by my alarm clock to an interview on CBC radio between the host of *Q*, Jian Ghomeshi, and New York Magazine art critic Jerry Saltz. They were talking about the 'reality' TV show *Work of Art: The Next Great Artist* and Saltz's experience as a judge. When Saltz was asked what it takes to be a great contemporary artist, he mentioned two things that still resonate for me: obsession and delusion.<sup>1</sup> Great artists that I admire possess these two qualities. They must be consumed with their thoughts, questions, concerns, research or another aspect of their art process and must be able to maintain a certain belief that their efforts are important enough to be realized; often resulting in the creation of an art-object forged by this determination. This compulsion to explore our own ideals, fantasies or fetishes seems instinctual as an artist and without shame. Driven by our own impetus for self-realization when making art there is often a euphoric sense of accomplishment not unlike sexual gratification via an object or experience produced by artistic fervour and a keen desire to succeed in realizing one's own goals and ambitions. This said art making is not completely self-indulgent of course. And, there is an element of the process, the exhibition, which functions as a stage for unveiling and sharing objects and ideas. In this exhibition, the works by Jen Aitken, Ryan Amadore and Jeremy Green function as pleasurable objects and loaded symbols with varied aesthetic, material and conceptual concerns; yet sharing a compulsion for both visceral experience and cerebral expansion.

Jeremy Green's sculpture *Behemoth* is composed of three elements: the paint sculpture, the glass plinth with light and the projection, or eclipse, on the ceiling. The paint sculpture is a biomorphic form that is approximately the size of a human heart or brain. Green creates this object through a process of layering and wrapping; whereby he lays out membranes of acrylic paint and gels on wax paper allowing them to dry and subsequently peels them like fruit roll-ups. He compresses these membranes of paint by compacting them in his hands like an anxious person using a stress ball to alleviate tension. After dozens of overlapping layers, a sculpture of paint is generated that resembles a stress ball pressed

so hard that it cannot return to its original state; perhaps because it has been impregnated with the maker's thoughts, anxieties and decisions, which become visible in the final form of the piece. Green uses a variety of hues to construct the piece evidenced by a few subtle splatters of paint and cracks on the surface that allow us to see into the first few layers of the piece. The paint sculpture can be viewed as having two distinct constituents: the large mass of a dark charcoal grey-violet and its protective shell of transparent gel. The transparent epidermis-like layer is slightly yellowed and suggests that some of the artist's skin flakes, oils and sweat have been transferred onto and into the paint membrane; highlighting the presence of the artist's hand and the labour to seal the layers below the surface. The final form and texture of the paint sculpture also reminds me of a nugget of gold and within the context of western Canada, the gold rush; a journey into the unknown in search of riches through resources. And, one of the most powerful symbols of this obsessive and somewhat deluded quest in the West is the gold nugget—Gold in its most raw form. It is this resource that still emblemizes currency. In this case though Green is not in search of gold per se, but perhaps for another kind of idol in the form of a paint sculpture that is being monumentalized by its exalted display.



Left: An image of the 'Alaska Centennial Nugget'. The largest nugget found there.  
Right: A still from *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

The paint sculpture is displayed on a plinth that is made of clear, frosted and mirrored glass. It is placed on a mirrored piece of two-way glass that reflects the sculpture and its surroundings—including the viewer. Inside the lower part of the column of glass is a light source that travels up the reflective interior of the column to illuminate the paint sculpture from below and the glass plinth from within. This light emerges from a flashlight and summons thoughts of telling ghost stories around a campfire using a device that we use to illuminate our pathway through dark-

ness. As the light makes contact with the paint sculpture it projects a shadow in the center of the light imaging a two-dimensional translation of this relationship between light and dark, or transparent and opaque, while creating an eclipse-like projection on the ceiling of the gallery. This method of display more closely resembles that of commodity display explored by artists like Jeff Koons in the eighties. In this series of works he examines how objects like vacuums are displayed in stores in relation to how art objects and artifacts are exhibited, and as a result fetishized, using museological display conventions. His sculpture, *New Hoover Convertible*, is composed of a plexi-glass vitrine, lights and an object: a Hoover vacuum. Green's *Behemoth* shares this method of display, yet he substitutes a vacuum for a mass of paint, which may serve as a monument to the medium of paint while showing it in a manner that celebrates it in its raw form, as a building block and resource for art making; suggesting the mediums expansive and layered histories.



Jeff Koons, *New Hoover Convertible*, 1980

This celebration and preservation of resources exists as a parallel to Jen Aitken's sculpture, *ottoman*. This work is made of two elements: the two rocks and the fabric upholstered structure that envelops them. The rocks are shale, a type of sedimentary rock that is formed from eroded particles of larger rocks, and were collected while Aitken was on a residency at the Banff Center. This experience in Banff's amazing mountainscape impacted her process and generated new forms where the artist was prompted to fuse natural and manufactured, or raw and processed, materials to create a sculpture that emphasizes the relations between them. The structure created to hold and presumably protect these rocks is mostly covered with a layer of soft leatherette fabric that is silver metallic and has a fairly reflective sheen. Another layer of beige sueded jersey fabric is used to create the customized containers that house the rocks. This carriage that encapsulates the raw materials acts like a con-

tainer to protect these fetishized stones and examine their relation with these eroticized synthetic fabrics.



Left: Ron Gorchoy, *Chevalie D'Eon*, 2008  
Right: Christo and Jean Claude, *Surrounded Islands*, 1980-83

The sculpture's title, *ottoman*, refers to the piece of furniture that one rests their feet on while sitting in a chair. This device that serves to alleviate the stresses of a hard day implies with it a certain air of luxury and leisure. Aitken's *ottoman* is able to rock back and forth with aid from the audience and as it does it makes a subtle sound like someone rocking in a chair. This potential for movement creates tension in the work and when it is still and not activated there is a desire created—at least for myself—to touch the work and set it into motion suggesting the potential for a relationship between object and viewer, as well as a relationship to the body. The tactility of the work and its sensuous surfaces remind me of American artist Ron Gorchoy's paintings. Aitken's work is of course not made of any paint; however in its form and structure it shares many links to abstract painting and specifically to Gorchoy's recent painting, *Chevalie D'Eon*, from 2008. This painting reflects a similar compositional structure and palette even utilizing a support that is comparable to that of Aitken's *ottoman*, yet Aitken delivers a sculptural device that sits below us, on the ground, as a subordinate and it is not hung on the wall like Gorchoy's work. This allows the work to have a tension as it rocks between functional design object and an art object, and it is this quality that allows the viewer to relate to and consider this device. This work also generates links to the collaborative artists, Christo and Jean Claude. In the early eighties, they realized a large-scale public installation work, *Surrounded Islands*, in which they wrapped several islands in Miami with large pink fabric shrouds. This specific work resonates with Aitken's in a few ways. On a formal level these two works have compelling overlaps in composition and material concerns.

Further, Aitken employs similar strategies to highlight the relations between humans and our resources: both natural and manufactured. Aitken examines these issues through her own subjectivities enabling her to create a sculpture that reduces and refines these ideas into a potent visual form that conveys a fetishistic interest in materials and a sincere desire to examine their potential to communicate through their tactility and ability to arouse our senses.

Ryan Amadore's work, *Trees Singing Saw*, is constructed of three components: the two hollowed trees, the speaker's inserted at the bottom of the trees and the stool with the bow and musical saw. The two trees are pieces of driftwood that have traveled in the sea for an unknown distance before washing up onto Jericho beach. As they dock at Jericho, the grounds workers pull them off the beach and store them in piles for them to decompose naturally. Amadore rescued these fallen trees cutting them into manageable lengths similar to that of firewood, however he does not intend to burn them for warmth, but repurposes them to become sculptural forms with a distinct function. He hollows each log out and then restacks them to return the logs close to their original form, although now they appear slightly synthetic exhibiting signs of their Frankenstein-like reconstruction. The logs now serve a different purpose as Amadore transplants speakers at the bottom of each tree and uses these now organ pipe-like forms to project sound through. This is reminiscent of Tim Hawkinson's *Uberorgan*, a piece that he made for the MASSmoca in 2000. Hawkinson used manufactured plastic ducts and pipes staged in an organic tree-like form to play a musical score that he created specifically for his elaborate organ-like instrument. This work uses all manufactured and synthetic resources to project its sounds, however Amadore uses natural materials to create a similar effect with a much different experience. In Amadore's previous works he has created contraptions that project sound through speakers and capture these vibrations to create paintings. In *Trees Singing Saw*, Amadore creates a more organic ad hoc-like work associated with a Canadiana aesthetic and more aptly linked with the iconography of the *Log Driver's Waltz*—a short NFB film from 1979. This is in contrast to Hawkinson's high-tech and sophisticated gadgetry. However, it is Amadore and Hawkinson's processes that are interesting; both artists follow their ideas and allow their works to manifest through a dedicated investigation of processes and materials.

During the opening of the exhibition, Amadore plays prerecorded mu-

sical saw sounds made in a recording studio through the repurposed trees and plays alongside the trees almost as if to serenade or converse with them. This performative element of the work not only highlights our relationship with trees and nature, but also emphasizes the artist's fetish with the natural world, specifically embodied in these emblematic symbols of nature and especially potent within our geographic context: in the wild western Canadian landscape. Further, by using the saw, a tool generally associated with the destruction and cultivation of this resource, Amadore uses these generated sounds to create an enchanted and eerie aura around them and effectively sound like lamentations for their past abuse; like a brother asking for forgiveness from his sister. And, in this way Amadore's work and his performative gesture infers undertones of our guilty conscious for the abuse we, and our ancestors, have imposed on our natural world with regards to our greed for, and over-extraction, of natural and manufactured resources without casting blame to any one person or group in particular; instead unearthing our own inextricable guilt by way of inviting the viewer to engage with and be a part of the performance.



Left: Tim Hawkinson, *Uberorgan*, at the IBM Building Atrium (New York), 2000  
Right: NFB film, *Log Driver's Waltz (still)*, 1979

The exhibition's title, *Western Eyes: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly; or Fetish?*, is admittedly verbose and maybe even a bit absurd and comical, yet it is sincere—a quality shared by all of the works by Aitken, Amadore and Green. It makes references to a number of cultural resources simultaneously; however its intention is to both consider and complicate the works in the exhibition while allowing for a fruitful multi-directional journey through the exhibition. Similar to the 'create your own adventure' novels popular in the 80's and 90's this exhibition appropriates this strategy asking the viewer to create their own pathway through the work and to choose a framework, or title, to consider their relations. This exhibition highlights and examines our eccentric fantasies and fe-

tishes and how they are translated into the material world—at least by artists—through art making. As artists, our experience with the natural and lived world as well as our use of resources, both natural and synthetic, can give us insights into our subjectivities and worldview. As the viewer, I expect to believe in the artist's obsessions; whether or not I care about them or believe in them. For me this obsession and delusion make the work valid, sincere and potentially contagious.

\*Notes on page 177.

## Notes\*

*Western Eyes* is a song released in 1997 by the trip-hop musical group Portishead. Its lyrics speak to the trope of the western gaze and ultimately of the west's greed and fetish for wealth at all costs through reckless means; exploiting whatever it can to get its own ends.

*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* is a film from 1966 by Italian director Sergio Leone and is arguably the most famous spaghetti western of all time. This film tells the story of three men who all aspire to claim a treasure of confederate gold that is poetically buried in the grave of a deceased soldier. This story again suggests the Western obsession for fortune and its deluded quest for 'freedom' through wealth.

A fetish can be viewed as either, an inanimate object valued for its alleged magical powers, or as an obsessive form of desire in which a particular object, or quality, is regarded with a form of gratification; sexual or otherwise.