



THIS BELONGS TO:

NAME

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BEATRICE'S CENTRE  
FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS,  
OR, HOW I LEARNED  
THAT MY MOTHER WAS RIGHT  
ABOUT MAKING ART IN  
A PRAIRIE TOWN DURING  
THE RISE AND FALL OF  
GRUNGE MUSIC

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Jo-Anne Balcaen  
Daniel Barrow  
Evan Tapper

Curated by  
Jennifer Cherniack

September 26 –  
November 22, 2008

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BEATRICE'S CENTRE FOR STUDENT  
AFFAIRS, OR, HOW I LEARNED THAT  
MY MOTHER WAS \_\_\_\_\_ ABOUT  
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JENNIFER CHERNIACK

Winnipeg breeds and fosters creative people – musicians, filmmakers, television writers, visual artists and curators.<sup>1</sup> What interests me is how the city is like an infectious disease. Once it's in your system, it's hard to ever get it out. All three of the artists in this exhibition, *Beatrice's Centre for Student Affairs*, or, *How I learned that my mother was right about making art in a prairie town during the rise and fall of grunge music*, are from Winnipeg – as is the curator (that's me). We all spent our formative years there, and at around the same time. By 1994, Jo-Anne Balcaen, Evan Tapper and Daniel Barrow had all attended the School of Art at the University of Manitoba. I, on the other hand, was going through puberty. And Kurt Cobain was committing suicide.

*Beatrice's Centre for Student Affairs* examines a small group of artists who graduated from the University of Manitoba in the early '90s as a micro-

cosm for art school culture, speaking to the lessons learned both within the formalized structure of the classroom and in those informal exchanges and activities that occur outside of this space. The works in *Beatrice's Centre for Student Affairs* tell stories about stories, about gossip, about drama, about relationships. This exhibition is the result of a rigorous, untraditional research project that began with a bit of stalking, progressed with a lot of talking and ended with an incredible amount of third-hand information. My intention was to get to the bottom of the art school experience.

Through my research, I discovered that these first-, second- and even third-hand accounts of events, stories and mishaps provided a personal, human context to the educational experiences – often quantified through grades, course calendars and class lists – I was seeking to explore. These stories filled in the gaps, explaining why the artists in the exhibition, and artists in general, create and act like they do,

using both formalized, taught knowledge and acquired smarts to navigate their way into the “real” world of artist culture.

The shared experiences and the artworks these artists have created since graduating have common threads – whether a result of their education, their generation, chance or a figment of my own colourful imagination. *Beatrice’s Centre for Student Affairs* is a forced reunion, at once disregarding and revelling in the tension and awkwardness that 15 passing years can bring. I didn’t know Balcaen, Barrow or Tapper during the early ’90s, despite being from the same city. (Since then, many of us have moved away from Winnipeg.) What we did share, however, was a time and place, which is not to be underestimated.

It has now been over five years since I graduated from art school and, frankly, I don’t really remember anything I learned. I remember the basics, the gist of things, but put me back in my *Art Since 1945* exam and I’d fail. What I gained from art school wasn’t technically even *in* art school. It was the informal, off the record, personal moments that formed my art school experience and made me want to be an artist. It was *around* art school that taught me about art.

At 18, I left Winnipeg to take the next step in my formative years, away from everything that had formed me in the first place. I was tired of Winnipeg. I felt as though I had exhausted it. The funny thing is, I hadn’t. I didn’t even *know* Winnipeg then. I had no idea how great the city was, until I left it. And until my mother started sending

me press clippings.

My mother’s not Jewish, but her mother-in-law was. My Baba. Perhaps the most influential, loving and guilt-causing woman I ever had the pleasure to know. She might not have raised my mother, but I’m pretty sure she passed the guilt torch on to her when she died. The press clippings were my mother’s not-so-subtle attempt to lure me back home. I ignored them for a long time, then finally read them.

At the turn of the 20th century, Winnipeg – the “Chicago of the North” – was among the fastest-growing cities in North America, with one of the largest rail centres and a booming grain industry. But because of the First World War, the rapid ascent of other major cities and the opening of the Panama Canal, Winnipeg’s status as a city on the rise dwindled, along with its growth. Winnipeg is a city that once was, and that could be, but never quite is. Its prime long gone, it lives in the shadow of its past.

There is a sense of humility that comes with having lived in a city like this. Winnipeg curator Sigrid Dahle spoke to the impact of the city’s history on its contemporary artists during her 2004 residency at the University of Manitoba’s Gallery One One One. The exhibition *Blind Spot: The Gothic Unconscious* proposed that an aura of tragedy and impoverishment manifests itself in the abject, uncanny and surreal quality of much contemporary Winnipeg art, even when the work doesn’t explicitly address the city’s troubled histories.<sup>2</sup>

I love Winnipeg. I’m from Winnipeg. I’ll always be a Winnipegger.

I stick up for what I call the most “magic and tragic” place on earth, at any cost. But I can’t go home. Not now, and maybe not ever. So I am stuck in this strange space of being an informed outsider, or an alienated insider. I am trapped in this incredible connected/disconnected tension about my home.

Tension is an underlying theme in all the works in this exhibition. It is also an underlying theme in art school. There is student tension and professor/student tension, but also the tension between faculty and staff. There is grad-student tension, professor tension, instructor tension, sessional tension. These tensions are universal, no matter what art school you go to. At the University of Manitoba in the ’90s, there was a great divide between the older, more traditional professors and the younger, more conceptual professors and instructors. As the legend (i.e., gossip) goes, this tension was felt by the students. Lucky for the artists, tension is also a reality in arts culture. How can it *not* be, when everyone is vying for the same grants, jobs, exhibitions and spaces?

In *Beatrice’s Centre for Student Affairs*, each artist approaches and attempts to resolve tension in his or her own manner, but at the heart of the works is Winnipeg’s magic/tragic dichotomy.

In Jo-Anne Balcaen’s video installation *Longshot*, the viewer is given, or perhaps forced into, the unique opportunity to become a voyeur of a real-life voyeur. Housed in a cozy, outhouse-like one-person shack, the video

documents Balcaen’s desperate attempt at contact with the guitarist of a moderately successful Canadian band. The video, told from the artist’s first-person perspective, follows Balcaen from her first encounter with the band to her most recent, most daring attempt. Initially, one can relate to Balcaen’s actions, as most people have experienced an overwhelming, irrational attachment to a celebrity – think of ’60s Beatlemania. However, as the viewer – tucked quietly away in the little wooden shack – watches Balcaen’s video, the artist’s actions become more questionable as the true story unfolds. Balcaen’s shameless, desperate attempts at contact with a “rock star” can no longer be dismissed as a teen fantasy or crush. Balcaen is, after all, a grown woman.

Accompanying *Longshot* are two other video works, *Backmasking* and *Lonely guy*. In *Backmasking*, Balcaen meticulously searches for subliminal messages in a song (by *the* rock band, of course) played backwards. Balcaen’s knack for finding relevant messages is eerie and effective. The work’s sadness and desperation is undercut only by its sheer ridiculousness. *Lonely guy* uses the same visual form as *Backmasking* and even the same song, but this time it’s played forward, offering the only hint to the band’s identity. In contrast to the song, the text in *Lonely guy* is the same subliminal messages used in *Backmasking*. This beautiful conversation between the actual song and these contrived messages creates a desperate, devastating tension that runs throughout Balcaen’s work. While her voice is distinctly female, the experience of a

one-sided love affair is universal. Balcaen's ability and eagerness to exploit her own weaknesses is admirable, and above all honest. While some might sweep their vices under the rug, Balcaen embraces her flaws as the driving force in her art practice.

It's a well-known fact that Winnipeggers can find each other no matter what city or country they are in. This is where Evan Tapper comes in. (Gossip: Evan and Jo-Anne dated in art school!) Evan and I met at a Toronto art opening and quickly discovered that his little brother was once roommates with my then boyfriend (also a Winnipegger; see above).

Tapper's *Eddy Explains That It's Not You* is a beautiful, tense combination of technological feat and emotional defeat. His quirky, pitiable, autobiographical and beautifully 3-D-generated character Eddy is projected life-size amidst a forest made out of cardboard that resembles a high school theatre prop. *Eddy Explains That It's Not You* is Tapper's unveiling of a character he has been working on for eight years. Eddy explains why he has a red balloon instead of a thumb, and the viewer becomes immersed in a world much darker and more complex than the quirky installation might suggest. Eddy and, in turn, Tapper gives us a glimpse into this bizarre otherworld that touches on very real aspects of life.

Like Balcaen's, Tapper's work is shameless, embarrassing, at times regretfully revealing, but, most importantly, honest. This is no small feat considering Tapper is telling a story through a four-foot character with a balloon for a thumb. Often speaking

from real-life experience, Tapper puts himself on the line for the viewer to see and judge. It is this dedication to the character and his disregard for keeping up appearances that makes his work so raw and visceral.

Tapper's method of storytelling is reminiscent of old Yiddish folk tales – fantastical, over the top, full of griping and suffering, but told with humour and hope. Unlike traditional Yiddish folk tales, though, Tapper's work is not religious – the artist is a self-proclaimed atheist – but one can't help but detect some faith at play. Instead of "G-d's will," Tapper puts his faith in humanity, giving a similar sense of hope. There's an old Yiddish saying (a curse, in fact) that goes, *Zolst farlirn ale tseyner akhuts eynem, un der zol dir vey ton!* – You should lose all your teeth except one, and that one should ache! Tapper's work comes from that impulse to kvetch, to give the bad with the good and tell an entertaining story.

In Daniel Barrow's video *Looking for love in the hall of mirrors*, the viewer becomes part of a larger virtual crowd upon activation of the work. Originally presented as a performance in Winnipeg, this piece is featured at InterAccess as video documentation. Barrow's videos are never just videos; they are experiences of loneliness and isolation to be shared. *Looking for love in the hall of mirrors* gives the viewer a sense of what Daniel Barrow's work is all about, from the intricacies of his movements, to the soothing yet eerie tone of his voice, to the energy a crowd can generate during these performances. This piece is particularly fitting for *Beatrice's Centre for*

*Student Affairs*, as it tells the story of a young man's journey to the big city of Winnipeg to go to art school. An exploration of sexuality, creativity and adulthood, the work embraces – yet gently pokes fun at – the art student. As in Balcaen's and Tapper's works, Barrow's performances and videos feed into the magic/tragic duality. Barrow depicts even the most despicable characters in the most beautiful way, and his absurd, humorous stories can truly move the viewer.

In Barrow's second video, *Artist Statement*, his character, or one like him, has graduated from art student to artist. The video speaks to the artist's struggles, desires and intentions. Barrow's hilarious, yet dead-on statement, "But mostly I just want to make people cry," marks the moment the viewer realizes that he or she has been duped (and willingly so) by Barrow. The complexity of Barrow's works are balanced by the simplicity of his tools. He animates drawings created on transparencies with swift and subtle movements, all the while narrating a story and keeping in time with music scored especially for each individual piece.

When I told Evan Tapper that I wanted to curate an exhibition of Manitoba artists, including Daniel Barrow, he said, "Oh! Danny! We went to art school together." Two artists whose work I admired, and saw similarities in, happened to be from the same city and went to art school together. Evan's "Where are they now?" list revealed that almost *all* his classmates went on to work in the arts – a phenomenal proportion compared

to my graduating class. There was something special about his time at the University of Manitoba.

*Beatrice's Centre for Students Affairs*, or, *How I learned that my mother was right about making art in a prairie town during the rise and fall of grunge music* is about a lot of things, among them community, and how personal relationships form and drive groups of people. During just four years, so much can be created, produced, gained and lost that it can't possibly work its way into an official history. For example, the most we know of Kurt Cobain's brief career is that Nirvana achieved success around 1990. He had a rocky relationship with Courtney Love, had a baby named Frances Bean, then killed himself in 1994.

In their own ways, the artists in *Beatrice's Centre for Student Affairs* tell tall tales that are more real and true than most documentaries, biographies or real-life reenactments. These works touch on moments and thoughts that are often left out or edited. The artists disregard, reject and manipulate facades and self-representation, illustrating moments of truth that cannot be quantified or verified. Much like gossip and memories, these tales reveal a more human aspect of life.

1. "My city's still breathing (but barely it's true) / through buildings gone missing like teeth. / ... I'm back with scars to show. / Back with the streets I know. / Will never take me anywhere but here." – The Weakerthans, "Left And Leaving" (2000)

See also Guy Maddin's *My Winnipeg*; Season 16, Episode 6, "Midnight Rx," of *The Simpsons*; *Scratching the Surface: The Post-Prairie Landscape* exhibition at Plug In ICA; and the *Subconscious City* exhibition at the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

2. <http://www.umanitoba.ca/schools/art/gallery/oneoneone/goth.html>

JO-ANNE BALCAEN is a Manitoba-born, Montreal-based artist who works primarily in video, sculpture and installation. She completed her MFA at Concordia University in 2000. Her work examines the commercialization of desire through popular culture and how this creates an inflated sense of expectation. Her recent focus has been the relationship between popular music and obsessive female fandom. Since 1995, Balcaen has exhibited her work in venues throughout Quebec, Canada, Europe and the U.S.

Winnipeg-based artist DANIEL BARROW uses obsolete technologies to present written, pictorial and cinematic narratives centring on the practices of drawing and collecting. He creates and adapts comic book narratives to “manual” forms of animation by projecting, layering or manipulating drawings on overhead projectors or antiquated digital paint programs, which he describes as “graphic performance or manual animation.” Barrow has exhibited widely and performed at the Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), New Langton Arts (San Francisco), the Contemporary Art Gallery (Vancouver) and the Gene Siskel Film Center (Chicago). He is the 2007 winner of the Canada Council’s Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunton Award, the 2008 winner of the Images Festival’s Images Prize and a finalist for the 2008 Sobey Art Award.

EVAN TAPPER, born in Winnipeg, is based in Toronto. He received an MFA from Carnegie Mellon University. His multimedia work has

been exhibited throughout Canada, the U.S., Europe, South America, Australia, the United Arab Emirates, China and Japan. Recent residencies include the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture; the Center for Contemporary Art, Kitakyushu, Japan; and Charles Street Video. He has received grants and awards from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, New York State Council on the Arts, the Manitoba Arts Council and the Jewish Foundation of Manitoba. Tapper has held academic appointments at the State University of New York Fredonia, Ontario College of Art and Design, and McMaster University.

JENNIFER CHERNIACK is the Assistant Curator and Public Programmes Manager at InterAccess Electronic Media Arts Centre. She has exhibited her artwork in Toronto, Winnipeg, Quebec City, London, Ontario, and Venice, Italy. Originally from Winnipeg, Cherniack brings several years’ experience in curating, outreach, education and installation at the National Film Board of Canada’s Toronto Mediatheque, Gallery 44, Sketch and Regent Park Focus in Toronto, the ArtLab Gallery in London, Ontario, and many independent projects in Toronto and Winnipeg.

BEATRICE CHERNIACK is the curator’s mother.

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about making art in a prairie town during  
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Curated by Jennifer Cherniack

September 26 – November 22, 2008

**Opening Reception:**  
Friday, September 26, 8 pm – midnight

**High Holiday Office Hours with the  
Almighty Creator of the Universe**  
Special performance by Evan Tapper

October 4, 7 pm – 7 am

Presented by the Koffler Gallery of the Koffler  
Centre of the Arts in partnership with  
InterAccess Electronic Media Arts Centre for  
Scotiabank Nuit Blanche 2008

**Special Artist Talk:**  
Daniel Barrow  
Thursday, October 16, 8 pm  
Join Barrow as the artist speaks about his  
work and performs excerpts from his  
overheard projector performances.

**Juicy Couture Panel Discussion, Saturday,**  
October 18, 2-5 pm  
**Keynote Speaker: Sharon Alward, Professor,**  
University of Manitoba, with presentations by  
*Rosemary Donegan, Nicholas Brown, Jennifer  
Slauenwhite, and Tejpal S. Ajji.*

**Moderators:**  
*Jennifer Cherniack, curator, and Beatrice  
Cherniack, social worker and the curator's  
mother*

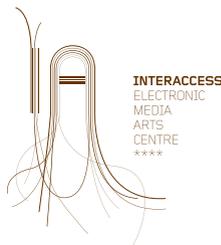
For more information on all the events,  
please go to: [www.interaccess.org](http://www.interaccess.org)

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