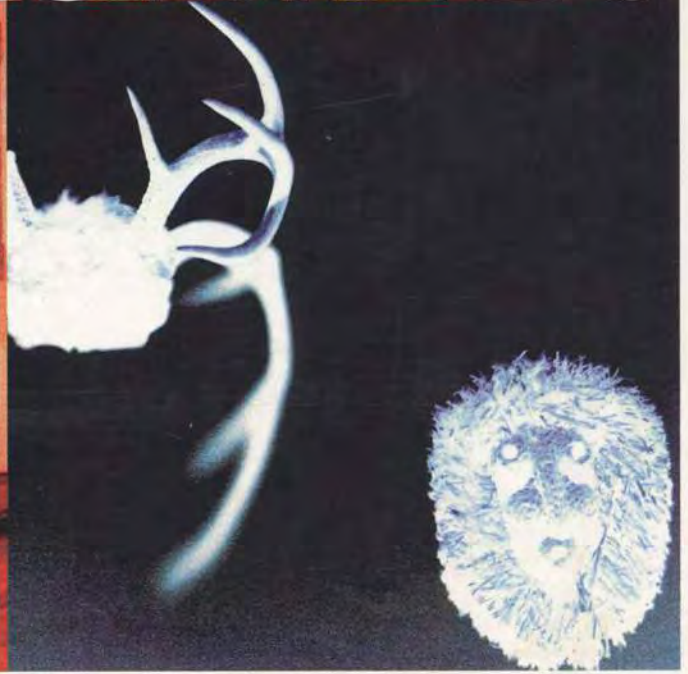
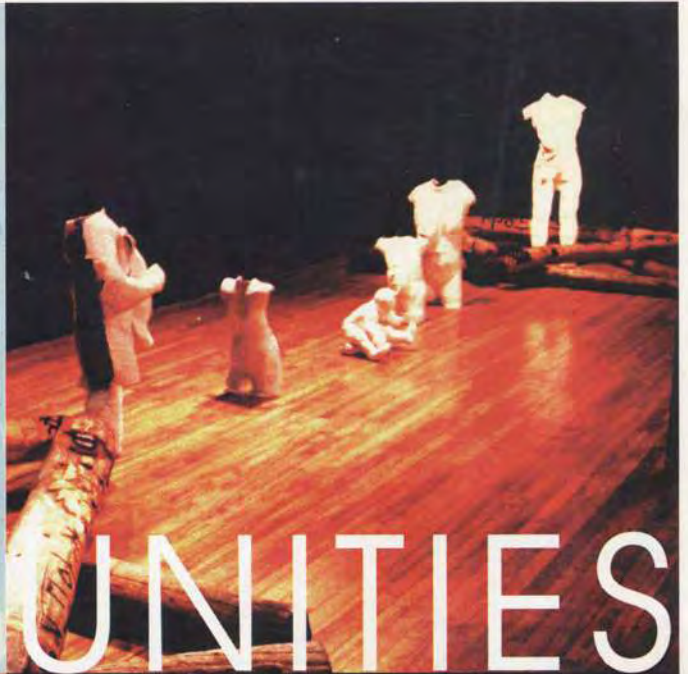


...D WAS NO...  
...ABLE TO...  
...S YOU LO...  
...ATTACK...  
...FEEL, JUST...  
...THE EXTRA...  
...ANOTHER, CRE...  
...QUESTION: WHERE ARE YOU...  
...I'M GAY WITH M...  
...AT HOME...  
...ALSO W...  
...DIFFERENT...  
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# COMMUNITIES

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## a brief introduction

COMMUNITIES began as an idea that developed into a concrete set of goals. This publication examines the four exhibitions that made up the project. Hopefully it provides a necessary overview, alongside a sense of closure.

For me, the idea began at an assembly of artist-run centres held in Moncton, New Brunswick in 1992. The event was organized by the Association of National Not-for-profit Artist-run Centres (ANNPAC). This was the meeting at which a group of cultural producers, calling themselves the Minquon Panchayat, challenged all of the participating centres to work towards equity and cultural representation within the network. The resultant meetings, articles and forums that followed on both a national and provincial level may have been tumultuous, but the floodgate needed to stay open.

In the fall of 1994, a curated exhibition at the Inc. entitled Proximities, helped set the process in motion locally. A number of events followed including the hiring of a Cultural Equity Coordinator, and the formation of a partnership with the Hamilton & Region Arts Council (HARAC) to help facilitate the activities of the Cultural Equity Mentoring Program (CEMENT). A culmination of sorts occurred in May of 1995. The Bridging the Cultural Gaps Symposium was presented in partnership with HARAC and the Art Gallery of Hamilton. It was well attended, featuring a diverse panel of speakers and workshops by participants of the CEMENT program.

Was it enough?

Discussion continued to focus on the idea of a series of exhibitions to be presented at the Inc., that would address issues of diversity, equity and identity. It was time to turn talk into action. Following a formal call for submission, and deliberations by our programming committee, specific artists were chosen and exhibitions scheduled. The result? Four site-specific installations, a series of well received exhibitions, an artists panel and this publication.

Perhaps not only an ending, but a beginning.

Ivan Jurakic, Administrator

# Communities Presence

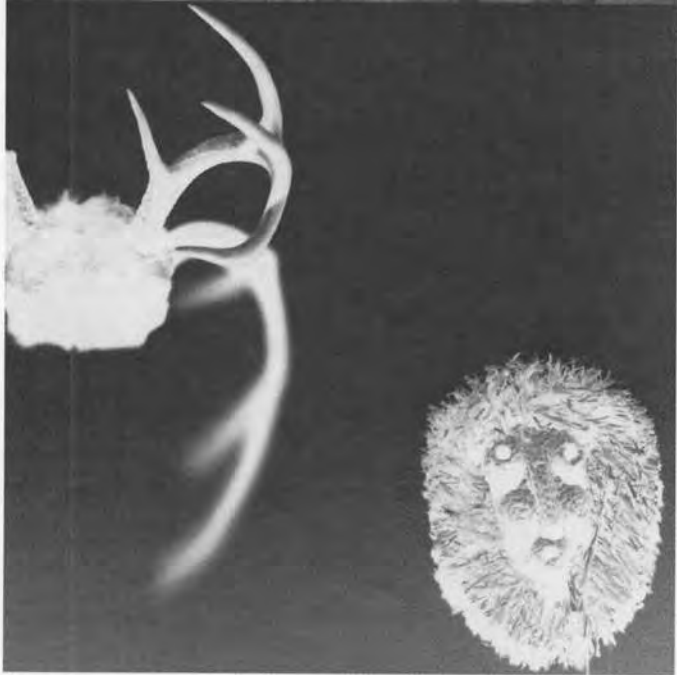
## *Evolving from there*

Much of what has served as art in the last decade in Canada, has been that which has addressed itself to issues of representation and identity, as well as to those of language. In the first instance, what, how, and by whom images are produced and interpreted - the rethinking of representation - has encouraged society to broaden its borders, to recognize 'others' floating amidst the 'main' stream. In terms of the latter, postmodernism has proven to us that language structures the way we view the world. Subsequently, text and theory have come to visibly reside in the domain of art. Relationally, issues of authority and power have risen to the surface, exposing the cultural determinants of ideology - that 'who' has the say, is also 'who' controls that which might be said.

In the 1980s, public and parallel spaces in Canada began to schedule into their exhibition programmes work that contested the privileged site of modernism and, hand-in-hand with that, the mainstream. From the mid-1980s and through the early years of the '90s - with a noticeably heightened presence in and around 1992, the year of the 'Columbus Quincentenary' - mainstream and alternative galleries proposed programmes of 'diversity'; funding bodies encouraged 'community' programming; reports on racism in the arts were called for; equity officers became the order of the day; and after 20 years of service to the alternative arts community in Canada, ANNPAC would be brought to its knees.

Yet while we continued to function during the crisis with the hope that a new (not multicultural but equitable) Canada might emerge - I think we nonetheless all held our breath ... waiting for the fall that





would signal the shift as a mere token gesture - yet hoping against hope that that wouldn't be the case. Exhibition programmes in the established public galleries in recent years would suggest, however, that the mainstream's encompassing of the margins was tokenism. In 1997, exhibitions of work by First Nations artists, artists of colour, women artists, gay and lesbian artists, among others, persist but in much reduced numbers. Too, the exhibitions, for the most part, continue the precedent of presenting the work of artists from the so-called margins as 'different' from the mainstream. Thus, these exhibitions effectively exclude the significance of alternative productions to a 'mainstream' agenda and history, as well as ensuring that the margins remain 'othered' - a homogenous group without cultural specificity.

However, in the artist-run galleries - in the institutions in our country that suffered - not merely shifted - during the crisis days surrounding 1992, I would venture that the move toward equity remains a vital presence. That the parallel network in Canada withered and emerged anew following the efforts of the Minquon Panachayat caucus, goes without saying. Following their actions, ANNPAC/RACA, the official artist-run service organization since 1976, met its demise as did its national 'voice' *Parallelogramme*. The 'system' rose anew in the form of the Artist-Run Network (1994) and *Mix*. That the exhibitions and events programming of parallel galleries across the country remain concerned with alternative practice and the relevance of issues of identity politics, access, and representation in the visual arts - as well as in the social fabric of Canadian life - indicates both sustained commitment and emergent change.

### *Artists and Community Work*

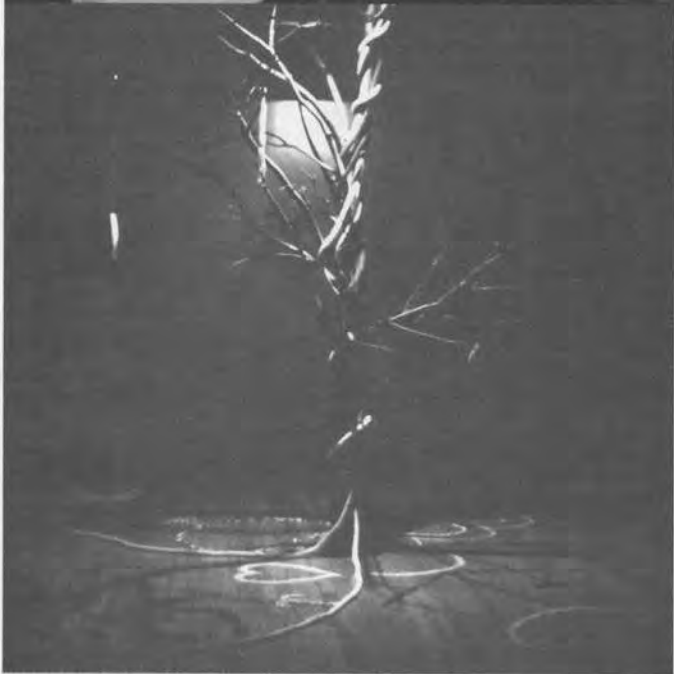
In the modern world, the word 'community' meant an organized political, municipal, or social

body; a body of people living in the same locality; a body of people having religion, profession, etcetera, in common. In the turn to the post modern, we were shown that modernism's definitions were exclusionary. The term 'community' became intimately associated with the politics of identity - with difference and diversity. More recently, however, we seem to have come to rest in a period distinguished as post-colonial - to a moment wherein modernist exclusions and postmodernist distinctions of Self and Other have - at least theoretically - been dispelled. Cultural theorists now suggest that we might speak of identity and difference without the necessity of bowing to the presence of an authorial centre. Rather than the 'other' - who must locate themselves in relation/opposition to a dominant - theorists now propose the 'subaltern' whose position does not require a hierarchical relationship to a dominant position.

The artists in the Inc. Communities Project came to the series with varying notions of who and what a community might be. While each artist spoke *from* a particular community, they were also concerned with reaching out to other communities, as well as with challenging traditional notions of 'community'.

Spencer J. Harrison's *Would You Beat this Man?* - an installation comprised of huge painted sheets of gauze bandaging wound about one another to create an enclosed 'room' of predators looming out of the dark - began in the interviewing of victims of gay bashing. It extended beyond that culture into the world in which the victim is served by a mostly homophobic community. Harrison placed his work not only before an Inc. audience of artists and cultural producers, but also in police stations, churches, and hospitals. As a conduit for change between a gay community and that of police, clergy, congregation, and hospital staff and patients, Harrison effectively challenged a (public) community to let the violence enter their spaces; to understand with both knowledge and emotion.





Soonki Park Schaub's *The Women's Spirit* installation spoke from a Korean woman's perspective. The work consisted of a mixed-media compilation of elements in which the female figure; variously as totem, plaster cast, textile sculpture, and video image, finds its earthbound body set free in a colourful bounty of origami birds. The implications of the work, particularly in its documentation of the suffering of Korean 'comfort women' during World War II, enlisted humankind in a re-consideration of women under patriarchy; the ideology which enabled the 'comfort women' to exist in the first place. In *The Women's Spirit* the specificity of patriarchy became 'cultureless'. In referencing the totem pole (whether Korean, North American or otherwise), the star (whether generic spiritual signifier or Star of David) among other cross-cultural markers, Park Schaub signalled a melding of cultures. Too, the work identified the crisis which cultures undergo in their transference and re-location to another Nation.

Marguerite Larmand's most recent environmental art project, *Part of the Fabric*, is an installation of both works of art as well as didactic materials. With the aid of photos, drawings, and text, Larmand creates a 'model' of sorts for a process of creative expression and dissemination. Beginning with a specific group of people - artists, students, colleagues, etcetera - Larmand enlists their creative efforts in realizing a work of art. The work subsequently envelopes several communities - those of the peoples participating, that of Marguerite, as well as that of others to whom the project thematically reaches out; the towns of Hamilton, North Bay, Thunder Bay, and Atlin, B.C. (for the Inc. project), for instance - as well as the viewer. Envisioning a 'community' as variable in terms of time, place, and individuals, Larmand's work reveals that 'community' is a shifting notion which is dependent on process rather than definitive categorizations.

In the collaborative work of Cat Cayuga and Sandra Vida, *Full Circle* - an installation incorporating a kitchen table replete with 'plans'; several symbolic objects related to myths, customs, and rituals; as well as a tree that whispers of the entwining of human tendencies - the artists construct the paths toward a new community. Pondering the similarities to be found in the development of the cultural specificity of their Onondaga-Mohawk and Scottish-Celtic ancestries, Cayuga and Vida re-interpret tradition. They posit that acknowledging our similarities would be more empowering and beneficial than dwelling on our differences. In revealing that all communities know themselves through adherence to a lexicon of specific symbols and ceremonies which structure their worldview, the artists not only enable informed border-crossing, but also - with persistence - the potential for the emergence of new communities. These 'new' communities would be a melding of several distinct communities, as well as a melding of heritages that cross boundaries of ethnic, gender, sexual preference, and so on.

Though seemingly as activists and/or documentarians, all of the artists in the Inc.'s Communities Project ponder the conceptual framework of the series; 'how does the artist contextualize themselves in a community?', as visual artists. Harrison, Park Schaub, Larmand, and Cayuga & Vida have found potent means with which to construct visual metaphors of the issues at hand. Spencer's bandages speak of both wounding and healing; Soonki's origami birds elicit a sense of fragility and ephemerality, of the potential to be whisked away on a light breeze; Marguerite's wooden mammoths suggest stability and longevity - for culture and for the environment; while Cat & Sandra's Tree posits growth amid the intertwining of its many branches. To speak poetically of the human condition has long been the artist's passion. Presenting us with an understanding or awareness of that which is often beyond fact and reason has been part of the artist's role. In igniting that which might be called the spiritual, these



# COMMUNITIES

January 10 to February 15

**SPENCER J. HARRISON**

**Would You Beat This Man?**

with off-site installations at the  
Hamilton-Wentworth Police Headquarters  
McMaster University, Blue Lounge in Hamilton Hall  
Christ's Church Anglican Cathedral  
and All Saints Anglican Church

February 28 to April 15

**SOONKI PARK SCHAUB**

**The Women's Spirit**

"When the tiger dies she leaves her skin  
When the human dies she leaves her name"

April 18 to May 24

**MARGUERITE LARMAND**

**Part of the Fabric**

with off-site installation at the  
Industry-Education Centre in Jackson Square

May 30 to June 28

**CAT CAYUGA & SANDRA VIDA**

**Full Circle**

May 31

**ARTIST PANEL DISCUSSION**

moderated by Carol Podedworny

artists give us pause to reflect upon an utopian ideal - the humane community.

## *Conclusion*

Within this series of exhibitions, 'community' is no longer simply a reference to factions 'other' than those of the mainstream. Each of the artists here have succeeded in introducing levels of community and in extending the meaning of the term. In their efforts, they have come to rest in the significance of language and process to the making of their art. Language is seen as integral to the definition and sustenance of a culture/community and, process becomes the vehicle through which subjects (both artist/makers and audience/interpreters) 'know' a work of art/an image of themselves. Subsequently, the work of Harrison, Park Schaub, Larmand and Cayuga & Vida is able to challenge, not only 'who' a community is - but even more fundamentally - how we understand a community to be constituted.

Carol Podedworny, Guest Writer  
June 1997



## ARTISTS

Spencer J. Harrison  
Soonki Park Schaub  
Marguerite Larmand  
Cat Cayuga  
Sandra Vida

Essay by Carol Podedworny  
Photos by Ray Cinovskis  
Design by Ivan Jurakic

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FOR THE ARTS  
SINCE 1957

# COMMUNITIES



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