





MARGINALIA

GETTING OUT OF THE HOUSE



Margaret Dragu & Pam Hall

with essays by
Glenn Alteen
Jeremy Todd

published by
Richmond Art Gallery

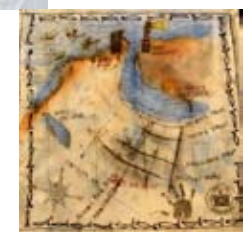
INTRODUCTION:
A FOUR-YEAR CONVERSATION

Dragu and Hall created over 2800 painted, stitched, and collaged cloth squares and almost 1500 emails

The collaborative exhibition *MARGINALIA: Getting Out of the House* by Margaret Dragu (Richmond, BC) and Pam Hall (St. John's, Newfoundland) is the result of a four-year conversation across Canada beginning in 2004. During this exchange Dragu and Hall created over 2800 painted, stitched, and collaged cloth squares and almost 1500 emails depicting the vagaries of domestic life, often with humour or outrage. Their coast-to-coast correspondence embodies notions of distance and boundaries and presents the possibilities and challenges of connecting over a great expanse, whether it be geographical, conceptual, or virtual.



2
0
0
4



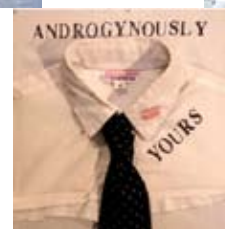
Through *MARGINALLA* their personal conversations join the larger critical discussions regarding feminist art practice.

Projects such as this are never the accomplishment of a single individual. First and foremost I thank Margaret and Pam for the opportunity to exhibit *MARGINALLA*. Many visitors returned two or three times with friends in tow with whom they wanted to share these conversations. We thank Jeremy Todd and Glenn Alteen for their thoughtful essays, each providing a distinctive perspective. Jeremy worked with Margaret and Pam in securing *MARGINALLA* for exhibition and Glenn was responsible

for bringing Margaret and Pam together initially.

We are grateful to the City of Richmond for their ongoing support and for special project assistance from Canada Council for the Arts.

NAN CAPOGNA
Richmond Art Gallery





Cette Table est la Centre de Ma Maison #863, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (left)

House #797, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (top right)

Running Plaid House #324, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (bottom right)





Square234, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (top left)
Square309wonders, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (bottom left)
Square590safeharbour, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (right)



While the basic language of the project is the textiles, their presentation and display online as well as in exhibitions and performances allow them to become building blocks within this national dialogue

Margaret Dragu and Pam Hall are two artists with long histories in interdisciplinary work. Dragu's history within performance art over the past 35 years encompasses many of the concerns of the developing medium and stands as one of the longest and most dynamic active careers in the country. Hall's work in interdisciplinary projects and installation has been an important one with a long string of strategic projects over the past three decades. While the two artists differ in media, one sees a correlation between the two practices in their concerns and themes. Coming out of 70s feminism and art activism both practices are stellar examples of how the personal is political. Focusing on women's

M...



experience, the body, the destruction of primary industries, and the development of interactive community practices, both artists' history are surprisingly aligned.

When we first talked of a collaboration between the two artists for the LIVE Biennial in 2005 I was excited to see what would develop. I knew both artists had histories of challenging media and working outside of their comfort zone. What I didn't expect was how enduring this whole project would be and how much it condensed both of their practices, their concerns, their issues, and their aesthetics into one incredible body of work that, I think, will stand singularly within the canons of Canadian Art.

MARGINALLIA was first of all a conversation, between two artists of similar age and experience, living on different oceans a continent apart. It started with the production of 12" x 12" white squares of cloth that each woman, every day, made into an artwork through a host of practices and techniques. On each shore, each artist created a work a day for the other, relating some aspect of their current situation. These were later photographed and emailed to the other in regular intervals.

While the basic language of the project is the textiles, their presentation and display online as well as in exhibitions and performances allow them to become building blocks within this national dialogue. At the

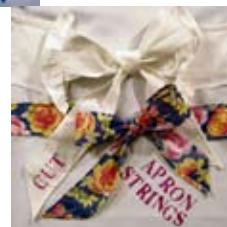
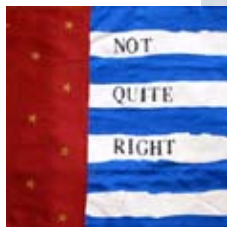


RAG each artist has built her house: this time within metres of each other, the country shrunk to a few feet of floorspace. Their separateness maintained yet still speaking back and forth to each other, the works lay out an important dialogue.

MARGINALLIA, so many years later, expands at a continuous rate into hundreds of these textile postcards. What Hall and Dragu have created is a portrait of time and as the project continues this becomes more obvious. Tracing their lives domestically and artistically it displaces notions of the personal and the public. As well as a finished project these house/tents are a documentation of the process, laying out a practice in bold and direct ways that accented differences

and reinforced commonalities despite the miles between.

There are lots of precedents one could point to. The history of quilting and the so-called “domestic arts” comes into play. In the 70s I saw a family quilt in Nova Scotia that was produced over five generations. Within the over 4000 hours of workmanship embedded in the fabric, women in the family spoke to each other over time. Another example is Joyce Wieland’s quilted works shown at the National Gallery under the title *True Patriot Love* in 1971; works that spoke from Toronto of a burgeoning national identity. Thirty years later, Hall and Dragu spoke from the edges of the country of an experience that was shared and

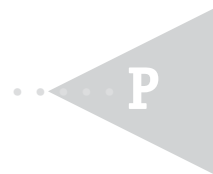


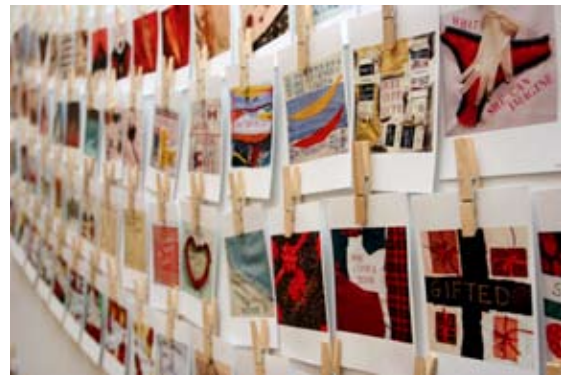


grunt gallery installation & performance



0
5





Installation views, Richmond Art Gallery

M



distinct, suggesting that many identities were shared within a national context.

Their work also refers to the history of mail art. Instead of the postal system, it takes advantage of digital technologies, through photos and email, allowing instantaneous transmission of ideas across the considerable distance between the artists. These works are correspondence but also self portraits when taken as two distinct bodies. What we get is the House of Hall rather than Pam's house; the shelter literally embodying the owner. They speak to the diarist practices of artists over several generations.

MARGINALLIA seems a fitting name for this body of work. These postal

textiles read as notes in the margins of the practices of these two artists. They show intention, reflection, and the distillation of ideas when two practices intersect and diverge. They reflect the day-to-day concerns of two artists in two distinct places living their lives and producing their art. This conversation across space and time speaks to the major concerns of current cultural practices by two senior Canadian artists on separate coasts. It is our fortune to be able to listen in.

GLENN ALTEEN
November 2008





dans l'apres midi #390, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (left)

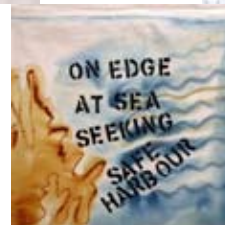
Hollywood/Vogue Photographers' Quote #1275, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2008 (top right)

Do You Think? #508, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (bottom right)





Square149, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2004 (top left)
Square659sailstime, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (bottom left)
Square318treasured, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2005 (right)

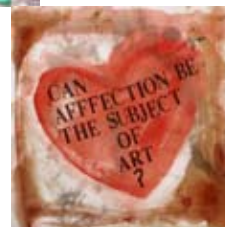
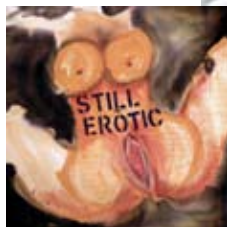




Four Loads #782, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (left)

Women's Hand Labour #798, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (top right)

Shoulder Pads #1064, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2007 (bottom right)



those who don't reign within the arkheion, are ironically inscribed by it—pinned down by its definitions, inclusions, and omissions. The archive is presented as self-evident and eternal. To get out of the house is perhaps to find a means of constructing oneself despite this—to create one's own subjectivity regardless of the seeming fixities sited in the arkheion.

The houses within *MARGINALLA: Getting Out of the House* seem to invert the assumed structures and purposes of the arkheion. They are suspended and tent-like, with no grounding, fixed enclosures, locks, or other encasing or obstructing features. They do not seem to provide protection nor do they isolate interior contents. They

invite trespass, with all points along their perimeters providing easy access. One can see inside them from the outside and vice versa. It is immediately apparent that the content of these houses exists in their surfaces. The walls of these houses are made of an archive they cannot possibly serve to house. A collection of sewn, drawn, painted, crocheted, or otherwise handcrafted squares or carrés are stitched together and supported by bamboo poles—seeming more like membranes, curtains, or drying laundry than anything to do with a rigid and authoritative architectural permanence. Margaret Dragu and Pam Hall call these structures “history houses”, and use them as a means to present some of the cross-country





Opening at Richmond Art Gallery (top left)

Working Tea Party with Richmond Women's Resource Centre at Richmond Art Gallery (top right & bottom)



correspondence that has accumulated between the two artists since early in 2004. Despite this archive being largely an index of an extended bi-coastal conversation between two people, the materials, processes, language, and imagery making up these squares are drawn from common frames of reference in vernacular speech, craft, art history, popular culture, and so-called women's work, amongst other things. The history houses are not presented as eternal allegorical narrative. The processes used to make these structures, and the indexical tracings of the two artists to be found in them, reveal an ongoing discovery of self through communicative exchange. The archive at the heart of the project is not presented as a self-evident set of

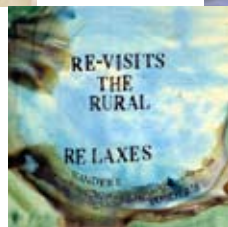
truths or beliefs, but rather a working model of relation. In doing so the project provides a dynamic contrast to the archival/epistemological limits and fixities of contemporary modern life, suggesting other modes of being beyond the cultural norms formulated by them. Both remarkably intimate and generously playful, *MARGINALLA: Getting Out of the House* challenges the power dynamics/determinations of subjectivity that perpetuate existing societal orders. The work's makers, and everyone else who engages with it, are empowered by a joyful struggle for self-definition through the recognition and affirmation of others—a working model for a kind of autonomy of expression in everyday life.





Margaret Drago's studio views

M . . .



The arkheion is meant to regulate society. Its corpus constitutes a systemic interrelationship of signs, behaviors, and concepts, adhering to what the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan has called “the symbolic order” of language. According to Lacan, we are born into societies with established symbolic orders. Every child must adopt this order through language—adhere to its linguistic laws—in order to function within society. The values and beliefs inherent within the symbolic order are internalized as one learns to speak and operate various technologies of communication.

The symbolic order, the defining societal archive or arkheion, inscribes us through this process, reproducing itself as it does so. *MARGINALIA*:

Getting Out of the House draws out and makes visible the construction of a regulating symbolic order in our daily lives by presenting a somewhat marginal set of concerns, processes, modes of expression, and communication/connection in relation to it. The project, in its various iterations, has used handmade material elements in combination with web-based technologies, public interactivity, performance, and audio in ways that challenge assumed borders, limits, and contexts for all of these processes and forms. Most importantly, *MARGINALIA*: *Getting Out of the House* articulates experiences of aging, gender role play, motherhood, domestic life, friendship, and sexuality that often seem absent within the dominant symbolic order





Deux Poissons #1055, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2007 (left)

M & P #945, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2007 (top right)

M & P Love Aprons #1109, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2008 (bottom right)





Square675solitude, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (top left)
Square676relation, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (bottom left)
Square641discourse, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (right)



and its discourses. Histories of patriarchal hierarchy are revealed to exist through an awareness of this absence.

In this way the work relates directly to the effects and intentions of many historical feminist artists who have successfully revealed, through engagements with archival structures, the limitations and inadequacies of the symbolic order of language as a patriarchal or phallogocentric linguistic system. This has often been achieved through a parodic usage of this linguistic system (in its various forms) for defining experiences outside of its own limits or corpus. Consider Mary Kelly's Post-Partum Document (1973-79), in which a scientifically clinical and generically bureaucratic system of documentation, description,

and display provocatively complicates any understanding of the emotional and psychological experiences of motherhood after birthing, or Martha Rosler's *The Bowery In Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974-5) in which reportage photography and vernacular speech fail to provide understanding or access to the marginal figures occupying Manhattan's Bowery District neighborhood at the time of the work's making. While *MARGINALLA: Getting Out of the House* shares this deconstruction of the symbolic order with historical feminist art practices engaging with archival structures, it deviates from them in the enactment of an archive in process that does not function parodically. Nor is it a self-proclaimed fiction, as

M

0
7

might be the case in later archive-structured works by artists such as Sophie Calle or Tacita Dean. The project does not mimic a stereotypically patriarchal linguistic structure or closed system. It destabilizes existing signage within the contingencies and flux of meanings that pass through dialogic exchange. More concretely, the project reverberates so effectively as a new type of *arkheion* because of its ability to exist both within and despite the conventional “white-cube” gallery space (a potential analogue of the official *arkheion* or ideological site of the symbolic order within society).

This otherness rests outside of Lacan’s conception of the symbolic order. It is other in a manner similar to feminine sexual pleasure or *jouissance*.

Lacan suggests that this feminine experience is unknowable because it cannot exist within a phallogocentric language. It cannot be recognized within an understanding of things centred around the phallus—a specifically male ordering of consciousness. Dragu and Hall address this otherness directly by providing an alternative developmental process from the one Lacan considers necessary and perhaps inevitable for the internalization of an existing symbolic order within society (eventually resulting in a submission to the “law of the father”). Lacan claims the need for a three stage process, involving a first “imaginary” phase in which an individual is not even aware of their own being-in-the-world (a pre-symbolic order state

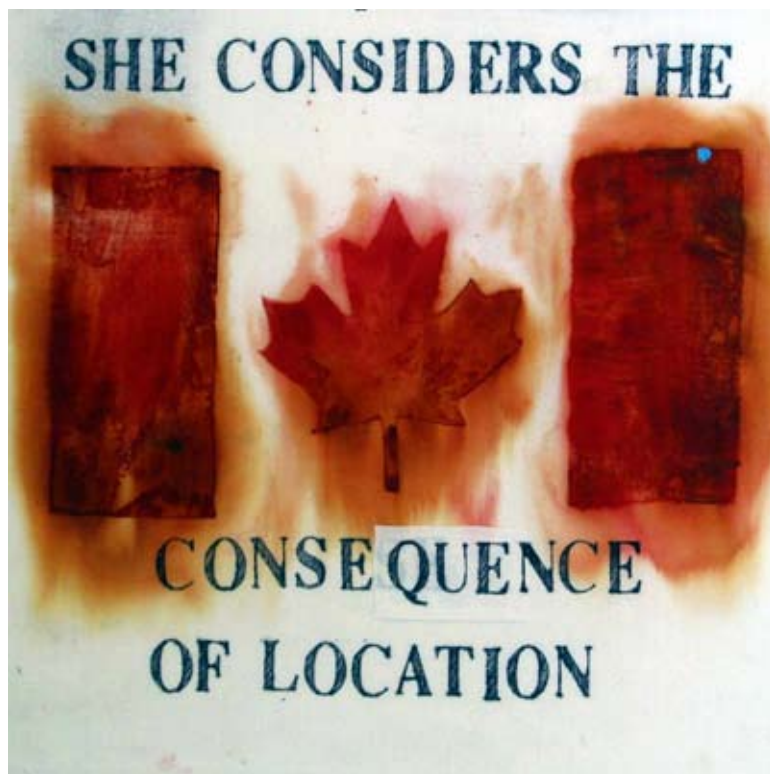




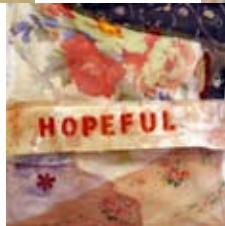
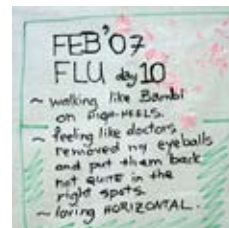
Getting In and Out of the House #1096, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2008 (left)
The River Runs Through It #1177, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2008 (top right)
 ... from *Landscape Series* #1027, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2007 (bottom right)

M...





Square850race, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (top left)
Square851langue, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (bottom left)
Square1067consequence, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2007 (right)





Pam Hall's studio views



Columbia, and Hall living and working on the other side of the country in St. John's, Newfoundland, the two artists continue to discover commonalities, differences, and shared cultural dynamics within each other. Through an almost daily, always weekly coast-to-coast exchange of squares, in combination with regular emails, the two artists have been able to reinvent themselves through each other—a kind of ongoing mirror stage process. They've been able to re-express their experiences and thoughts in a manner that borrows constantly from the "law of the father" (the word or logos), while returning to an ongoing state of becoming and discovery that uses the existing symbolic order as a

malleable material rather than a fixed set of parameters.

Within the potentially life-long mirror stage bond that *MARGINALLA: Getting Out of the House* provides, Dragu and Hall are able to create new meaning through their use of the existing symbolic order. They are no longer inscribed by it. They are able to get out of the house. This project, and by extension the artists' lives, becomes an ongoing development of relationships and thoughtfully nomadic migrations of understanding, disavowing any dependency on some previous finality in a third Oedipal phase of submission.

In many respects Dragu and Hall engage with Lacan's conception of the symbolic order in a manner that echoes the concerns and ideas of the

M



so-called postmodern or poststructuralist feminists. The artists' ongoing process shares with them a rejection of absolutes—any essentializing claims that might unwittingly perpetuate a phallogocentric marginalization of other points of view, other ways of being. They also share an avoidance of any determinations of meaning through projections of binary oppositions or negations (often directly relating to possession of the phallus). In this way the artists produce something akin to what Hélène Cixous and others have called feminine writing, which rejects the voice of so-called masculine writing or art: “I am the unified, self-controlled centre of the universe. The rest of the world, which I define as Other, has mean-

ing only in relation to me, as man/father, possessor of the phallus.” Like Julia Kristeva's conception of women existing in a position of “becoming” in relation to the symbolic order – as an ongoing state of liberation from the cage or prison of language—*MARGINALIA: Getting Out of the House* avoids any fixity of identities out of time, any conveyance of eternal values or singular modes of being. It is not by accident that the artists' history houses invoke the tents of wanderers, gypsies, and nomads, dynamically fluid in their ability to relocate and reposition.

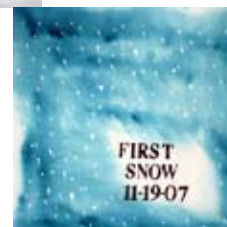
While a lot of poststructuralist feminist thought has been criticized and sometimes dismissed as academic, unnecessarily difficult, or uncritical

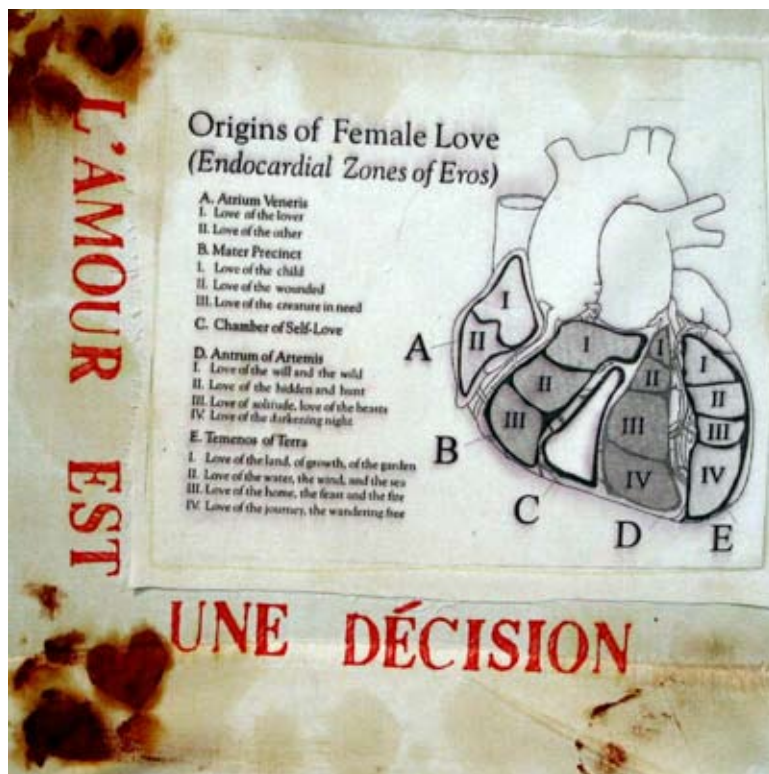




Elles Dansent Ensemble Mais au Bord de deux Mers #392, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (left)
Re-Pattern #426, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (top right)
Patterns #641, Margaret Dragu, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (bottom right)

M ...





Square768merefille, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (top left)
Square769caretaker, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (bottom left)
Squaresquare786l'amour, Pam Hall, mixed media on cotton, 12"x12", 2006 (right)



0
8

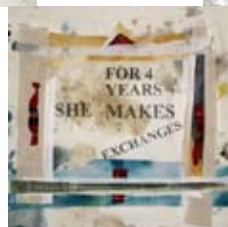
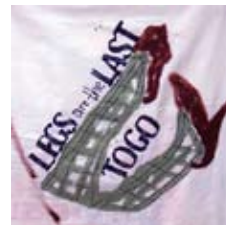


... P

of its own privileged positions within hierarchical constellations of race, class, and institutional legitimacy, *MARGINALLI: Getting Out of the House* manages to avoid such problematic complications and oversights. While deeply informed by theoretical models grounded in postmodern or poststructuralist thought, the project embodies a state of praxis in which any separation of discourse, subject position, and action is collapsed. The work is embodied, with the artists, through their actions in the world, “speaking” for, and to, each other. While the primary addressee is always one of the two artists involved, the art context renders the ongoing exchange explicitly public. We become secondary viewers, readers, observers, and

interpreters of a primary relationship. We witness a ritual in progress, one that intentionally confuses perceived barriers between art and life. Like much of the work by feminist performance artist Linda Montano, or some of the historical art actions affiliated with Fluxus, Hall and Dragu present a living art that cannot be rendered museological—compartmentalized or contained within existing systems of categorization and dichotomy (between art and life, permanence and transition, public and private, etc.). We are presented with reconfigurations of existing structural forms in language, the material world, space, time, and the body, which up-end the order of things. These uses produce new meanings—meanings extending

M



beyond the elite interests determining general limits and controls of understanding and behavior.

MARGINALLIA: Getting Out of the House dances freely around the arkheion, revealing both its artificial boundaries and the existence of other possibilities. The philosopher and critical theorist Jacques Rancière has claimed that, “Humans are political animals for two reasons: first, because we have the power to put into circulation more words, ‘useless’ and unnecessary words, words that exceed the function of rigid designation; secondly, because this fundamental

ability to proliferate words is unceasingly contested by those who claim to ‘speak correctly’.” In continuing to correspond with each other publicly, Hall and Dragu air out their words and each other, powerfully transfiguring the maxim that “the personal is political”. Most importantly, they make visible, through their communicative exchanges, a possible autonomy of expression in relation to existing hegemonic structures—an empowering reinvention of existence available to all of us in our everyday lives.

JEREMY TODD



.....



.....

2
0
0
9

..... P

Margaret Dragu

Margaret Dragu began her art practice in 1971 as a dancer and choreographer. She collaborated with many artists in Toronto, New York, and Montréal, moving into film, visual art, theatre, publishing, television, radio, and burlesque. Her work has been shown across Canada and Western Europe. Dragu is the first artist featured in *Canadian Performance Art Legends* (a performance and publication project initiated by the Toronto-based organization FADO) to highlight the work of senior Canadian performance artists. In her home town of Richmond, BC, she is known equally as an artist and as a body practitioner, working in community and wellness centres as a fitness and yoga instructor and personal trainer. Her clients range from clinical populations (heart, stroke, diabetes, post-surgery) to general populations including weekend warriors, visually impaired, and elite athletes. She has created many large scale performances and videos that include participants from all of her communities.

Pam Hall

A 1970s graduate of Sir George Williams University (now Concordia University) in Montréal, Pam Hall moved to the Canadian east coast after completing her studies. Hall is an interdisciplinary artist working across, and sometimes between, the boundaries of medium and discipline. She makes objects, constructs installations, works with language, and is engaged in film, video, and, most recently, performance. She works alone at times, inside and outside of her studio, as well as collaborating with individuals and communities. Based in St. John's, Newfoundland, she travels extensively to pursue the creation and presentation of her work, and for over a decade she has been a faculty member in the MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts Program at Goddard College in Vermont. She has won national awards as a film designer and children's book illustrator, has an extensive exhibition history in Canada and abroad, and in 2002 was inducted into the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts.

Photography:

Page 11:

Merle Addison

Page 12:

Jacob Gleeson

(top left, bottom left)

Bryan Melvin

(top right, bottom right)

Page 20:

Isloo Kyung MacLaurin

Page 22:

Margaret Dragu

Page 31:

Pam Hall

All art photography by the artists

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts, The British Columbia Arts Council, and The City of Richmond.

Pam Hall & Margaret Dragu

MARGINALLA: Getting Out of the House

Richmond Art Gallery

11 September to 31 August 2008

Graphic design: Gary Shilling

Copy editing: Graham Sheard

Printing: McCallum Printing

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication

A catalogue record of this publication is available from Library and Archives Canada

ISBN 978-1-926594-03-3

RAG

Richmond Art Gallery

7700 Minoru Gate

Richmond, BC

Canada V6Y 1R9

Tel: 604.247.8300

Fax: 604.247.8301

Web: www.richmondartgallery.org

Email: galler@richmond.ca

© 2009 Richmond Art Gallery,
the artists, and the authors

Jeremy Todd's essay notes:

For an in-depth consideration of archives and their significance in the regulation of societies please see Jacques Derrida's book *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Eric Prenowitz, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), pp.64-66.

Ann Rosalind Jones, "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of L'Écriture Feminine," *Feminist Studies* 7, no. 1 (Summer 1981), 248.

For those readers interested in a review or introduction to Julia Kristeva's work please see *The Kristeva Reader*, Toril Moi, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

As quoted in Davide Panagia's interview text "Dissenting Words: A Conversation with Jacques Rancière," *Diacritics* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2000), 115.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ARTS COUNCIL



