

# WHO IS CREATING WAVES IN THE **CANADIAN** ART SCENE?

■■ TrépanierBaer

MELBOURNE ART FAIR 2010

**MELBOURNE ART FAIR**  
**AUGUST 4 TO AUGUST 8, 2010**  
**TRÉPANIÉRBAER GALLERY**  
**BOOTH B78**  
**ROYAL EXHIBITION BUILDING**  
**PRESENTS**

**EVAN PENNY**  
**CHRIS MILLAR**  
**LUANNE MARTINEAU**  
**KENT MONKMAN**



## A GOOD WEST WIND

If you are not from Calgary, you might not know about a Chinook. It is a pocket meteorological phenomenon caused as westerly winds cross over the Canadian Rockies during winter. Along the western edge of the Prairie, a Chinook can suddenly displace an Arctic air mass with balmy skies and rapidly lift the local temperature from a frigid unbearable minus 20° C to a temperate plus 20° C. The Chinook effect is temporary; conditions revert invariably to the prevailing Alberta harshness. That these isolated mild spells relieve an otherwise long winter is no small determinant of Calgary's position as an oasis of prosperity and self-styled cultivation, supporting a fast-growing, motivated, educated, libertarian populace.

Calgary's visual arts setting would seem to benefit from a notable aggregate of institutions—the vigorous, dynamic Alberta College of Art + Design, the richly endowed Glenbow Museum, a fledgling contemporary Art Gallery of Calgary, longstanding programs at the Illingworth Kerr Gallery at ACAD and the Nickle Arts Museum at the University of Calgary, an extraordinary critic, Nancy Tousley, on the staff of the daily Calgary Herald, proximity to the world renowned Banff Centre for the Arts and the legacy of the acclaimed artistic component at the 1988 Winter Olympics. However, Calgary's aspirations to transform itself from a fortunate prairie city to a true cultural metropolis remain frustratingly, inexplicably unmet. As often results in such cases, the institutional community

displays regressive predilections to disquiet, suspicion and too much sweating the small stuff. Amid such lack of cohesion, a small private gallery has emerged as the bastion and beacon for civic embrace of living art in Calgary, salving an insular, somewhat embittered atmosphere, not unlike the Chinook inversion.

TrépanierBaer resembles an establishment of the Old West in one respect only. Please check all *weapons* (i.e., attitudes, prejudices, rivalries, grudges) at the door. Not to say that it is a neutral place, rather, the opposite. Yves Trépanier and Kevin Baer founded the gallery in 1992 with a conviction that a fresh business model was required to foster long-range vision and support for art and artists. Banished also are comfort aesthetics, vouchsafe standards and blue-chip calculations. At TrépanierBaer, collectors and indeed the public can expect to encounter the new, query the gracious, well-informed proprietors and engage one another through experience and conversation about art. Above all visitors are prodded to look beyond the present, to envision the implications down the road latent in the artworks: *Are these the seeds of change, my change, before me?*

This proves to be a successful proposition in Calgary, whose prodigious, inexorable growth is propelled by an entrepreneur class that, whatever it lacks in polish and sophistication, respects the investment of skill and creativity and gets innovation and diversity. Calgary's rightful claim to civilised stature in Canada

and internationally is pending, no doubt inevitable. TrépanierBaer cannot carry its city there single-handedly, but for almost twenty years it has been the model of what it will take.

Before opening its doors, TrépanierBaer commissioned a gallery that anticipated its spatial needs ever since. It was designed by Urs Kick, a Swiss architect now living in Schaffhausen. In 1991, Kick worked for the Calgary firm Chomick/Crittenden. His brief was to insert a warehouse-type white box into the ground floor of an ordinary Class B office building just off the central business dis-

trict. Kick created an elegant, versatile gallery in deliberate contrast to the indifference of its building. TrépanierBaer knew that its program would be multidisciplinary, so a series of minimal rooms accommodate a variety of media. Its functional box structure floats in the building's anonymous grid. None of the perimeter walls attach to the primary edifice. Its tremendous sight lines shows work beautifully, easily moving from big canvases to video installation to intimate exhibitions of photographs or drawings. At the outset, the gallery embodied its own meaning as a container of ideas. The *idea* of a provisional/permanent space, the *idea* of inserting a gallery into this nondescript building stood for inserting visual arts *ideas* into a city that had no idea yet what it was capable of accepting.

The gallery built its mandate on what was not being shown or seen. In 1992, that was photo-based contemporary art. Rather than a conventional multi-streamed monographic program, it grouped artists whose relationships might not be readily apparent into thematic clusters whose curatorial bases directed attention to the open-ended nature of artistic imagination and an awareness of multiple outcomes inherent in comparable lines of investigation. Thus in the inaugural TrépanierBaer exhibition, *Reinvented Sites*, then-Montreal photographer Geoffrey James (now living in Toronto) was represented by his silver-print views of Old World heritage sites and New World public parks. In one sense a continuation of the age-old tradition of the pleasing landscape vista. James's works were also morbid portraits of stasis, neglect, deterioration, entropy—and, hence, of consequences. His were exhibited with works of the New York photo-deconstructionist Ellen Brooks and Montreal painter Michael Smith. (James and Smith still show with TrépanierBaer. James' retrospective, *Utopia/Dystopia*, was organized by the National Gallery of Canada in 2008.) Other gallery artists that explore varied facets and repercussions of photographic, electronic and digital reproduction include Vikky Alexander, Martin Bennett, Chris Cran, William Eakin, Wyn Geleynse, Fred Herzog, David Hoffos, Micah Lexier, Liz Magor, Al McWilliams, Kent Monkman, Evan Penny, Alison Rossiter, and Danny Singer.

Yves Trépanier recalls, "We developed the stable based on several ideas, one being that no public gallery or museum in Calgary consistently presented a rigorous modern and contemporary program. Education figured into our thinking. The country's art scene was, and still is, varied, regional multidisciplinary and multi-generational and it is connected to a larger international scene. We wanted to reflect that reality and bring it to Calgary. TrépanierBaer being a container for ideas was important then and remains so now. The notion of taking risk is also paramount. If artists take risks, as it seems to be built into their DNA, then the dealers and gallerists representing them should too."

This far-sighted outlook instilled at TrépanierBaer signalled immediate relief to a number of outstanding Southern Alberta artists, many who had staked livelihoods upon their roles at the art colleges, followed out all the opportunities staged by Canada's public art system, in every way taken command of their creative capabilities, only to arrive at midcareer eddies, of a regional variant, no less, even as they were verging on national reputations. Mature artists such as

Eric Cameron, Chris Cran, Ron Moppett, and Arlene Stamp responded to the gallery's pledge of a continued outlet for their work and found it released them to pursue their ambitions in a total manner. In their turn these senior figures proved exemplary to subsequent generations of home-bred Western Canadian artists, such as Christian Eckart, David Hoffos, Tanya Rusnak, Luanne Martineau, Martin Bennett, Graeme Patterson, Chris Millar, and Ryan Sluggett.

Among many fortuitous matches between TrépanierBaer and its artists and tales of jointly cultivated potentials that might not have been tapped under any other circumstances, David Hoffos' story stands out. Hoffos comes out of Lethbridge, Alberta, some 200 km south of Calgary, the epitome of a small dusty prairie city that happens to be the site of a distinguished university, where Hoffos studied. However his artistic mode is almost completely self-taught and -invented, raucously jerry-rigged, subversively populist. He gave as much, if not more, tricks and techniques to his teachers, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, as he took. Out of scavenged, audio-visual hardware, mirrors and hand-cut screens, Hoffos creates short, silent, cinema loops that encapsulate, perpetrate and endlessly perpetuate cyclical episodes of desire and danger. His mini-panoramas of such irresistible appeal and enchantment unfurl from the equivalent of a huckster's portmanteaux, peddling clandestine glimpses into the subconscious. In 2002 Hoffos foresaw a work of an operatic scope and funhouse scale that would take several years to execute. TrépanierBaer committed every April on its calendar from 2003 to 2007 to premiering *Scenes from the House Dream* in five annual phases. Then TrépanierBaer supported an ingenious system of crates, devised by Gerry Johnson of Paradise Packaging working with the artist and the gallery and with the Southern Alberta Art Gallery in Lethbridge, to travel and display the mega-opus. In November 2009, the complete *Scenes from the House Dream* launched a national museum tour from the National Gallery of Canada.

It should be clear by now that out of its sensitive address of the special conditions of Calgary, TrépanierBaer has in fact made a national contribution. The existing galleries in Canada that have earned comparable stature can be counted on one hand. Now wherever TrépanierBaer travels or whoever visits TrépanierBaer, a mini-Summit is a distinct possibility, certainly the potential of lasting developments. The decision for instance to match German sculptor Stephan Balkenhol in a tandem exhibition with the Toronto supra-realist Evan Penny, as occurred last May 2009, was not so outlandish a gambit as it once might have seemed. The warm wind that regularly channels out through TrépanierBaer has worked down the resistance of grouchy, conservative Calgary. They just about believe anything could happen there these days.

Text by Ben Portis

*Top Left:*  
Installation view, *Eric Cameron exhibition at TrépanierBaer, 2008*

*Bottom Left:*  
Installation view, *Evan Penny and Stephan Balkenhol exhibition at TrépanierBaer, 2009*

TRÉPANIÉRBAER IS UNIQUE FOR A TRULY NATIONAL ROSTER THAT MAKES IT A ONE STOP VENUE FOR THE BEST IN CANADIAN CONTEMPORARY ART

Richard Rhodes  
Editor, *Canadian Art* magazine



## KENT MONKMAN

The art of Kent Monkman proposes a rich, unlikely intercourse of Aboriginal identity (Monkman is of Cree and Anglo-Irish Canadian descent), queer codification, and a forlorn homoerotic myth of the Old West, that is the fateful, conflicted encounter between European explorers, trappers, traders, soldiers and settlers leading to a cruel conquest of the indigenous inhabitants and their lands. With his invention of an alter-ego character named Miss Chief Eagle Testickle in 2002, Toronto artist Kent Monkman opened a vast imaginative territory to explore; ironically, because he also singularly embodies its limits. Miss Chief first appeared in a small, scenic canvas, *Portrait of the Artist as Hunter*, now in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada. This is a rare if not unique instance of a performance art character assuming original incarnation in painting. (Since then Miss Chief has also made several live appearances as well.)

Miss Chief behaves as a metaphysical traveler, simultaneously existing in past, present and future, being the trickster paragon to both the Aboriginal and the European, and enacting a two-spirited sexuality, that is to say, Miss Chief loves men both as male and female. Her time-traveling profile exposes the unspoken truth that all painters of Romantic history—David, Gericault and Delacroix, Turner and Friedrich, and the roaming artists of the North American frontier, Kane, Catlin and Bierstadt—were similarly metaphysicians, substituting base characters, places and events with virtuous ideologies. The panoramas of Albert Bierstadt are the ultimate example; they portrayed the lands before their spoilage, upon which the minimized presence of the original human inhabitants often disappeared completely. Monkman treats these archetypal American landscapes as haunted stages, from which the ghosts of vanquished peoples, lost minds and lives, arise from an implicit burial ground to re-enact their encounters, with outcomes-hardly predestined any longer in the wild card presence of Miss Chief.

Kent Monkman lives and works in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. His work has been exhibited widely in Canada and internationally, most recently at the 17th edition of the Sydney Biennial, *The Beauty of Distance* curated by David Elliot, and *Remember Morality* at the Witte de With Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, Netherlands. Upcoming exhibitions include, in 2012, a solo exhibition at the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City and later this year a group exhibition titled, *Vantage Point* at the Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C. His work is represented in many private and public collections including the National Gallery of Canada, the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts and the Art Gallery of Ontario to name a few.

*Top:*  
**Death of Adonis (2009)**  
Acrylic on canvas  
183 x 305 cm

*Bottom Left:*  
**Old Bear with Tinselled Dandy No. 10,601 (2008)**  
Acrylic on canvas  
76 x 61 cm

*Bottom Right:*  
**The Death of Hyacinthus (2008)**  
Acrylic on canvas  
61 x 76 cm



## LUANNE MARTINEAU

In 2009, the startling death of Jeanne-Claude and Coosje van Bruggen were mortal memoranda that some twenty-five years ago, widely ascribed, male-dominated stories of Pop-Art assemblage were amended with the blessings of two of the main protagonists, Christo and Claes Oldenburg, who henceforth shared credit with their partners. The upshot could not be made plainer. Pop is politic. This remains a radical proposition, of which Victoria, British Columbia artist Luanne Martineau is one of the most compelling contemporary proponents and exemplars.

Artists' work in textile remains freighted with gender associations that engulf many passable appraisals of their intention and effect. Noble purpose and ambition, readily granted to painting (whether by a man or a woman) do not extend to soft media as a matter of course. Martineau sculpts primarily in hand-spun wools and industrial produced felt, expertly articulated with shears, dyes, needle and threads.

*Brickmaker* takes the piss out of machismo artist signifiers. Ashy cigarette butts pile amid "dust breeding" on the ground. Another smouldering butt is tucked into the apex of the slumping grey felt, filleted into Robert Morris ringlet strips, with a couple of phallic Warhol bananas thrown into the shit sundae for good measure.

To top everything off, it is a safe wager that *Brickmaker* actually refers to the eminent Vancouver

sculptor Liz Magor. It is not easy to be a feminist art legend anymore. Could shreds of Jana Sterbak's *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* really be trailing along the floor?

Ribald parody for the good of the art has only occasionally been had since the Wife of Bath regaled her fellow pilgrims on the road to Canterbury. With a fine sense of proportion, beauty and delicacy, Martineau precisely doses and delivers a healthy taste of the absurd.

Luanne Martineau lives and works in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Her work has been exhibited widely throughout Canada and the US, most recently at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal in a solo exhibition titled, *Luanne Martineau* curated by Leslie Johnson and *Visceral Bodies* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, an exhibition curated by Daina Augaitis. Her work is represented in many public and private collections in Canada and internationally including the National Gallery of Canada, the Vancouver Art Gallery; the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria to name a few.

*Brickmaker (2009)*  
Industrial felt, pin felted dyed wood and thread  
305 x 140 x 61 cm



## EVAN PENNY

That Evan Penny assiduously dedicated himself along a path of sustained observation and acuity of the human figure and head for over twenty-five years, and along several lines of investigation, can be appreciated in a glance at any one of his most recent works. Penny has been a stalwart of the TrépanierBaer stable since 1995. Over this period he has built his intensely realist figurative sculptures from the idea of core bodily form out to the micro-dermal surface analyses of wrinkle and pore then plunging back into the tissue to identify not appearances but the innate sources of animation and expression.

The profound objectivity and technical discipline practiced by Penny paradoxically approaches the very existence of the human soul. And to no great surprise, the evidence of soul does not necessarily reside in the conscious, outward presentation of the face. It can be felt in the back, shoulders, neck and skull of a man, such as *Danny*. His compressed being, effacing the wall, denied fleshly, photorealist pigmentation that Penny long ago mastered in his silicone works, composes itself against the effects of time, that is to say the mundane effects of life that are so often borne or felt in these regions of our body. Despite being created from bronze, *Danny* is not heroic. Incidental signs of life's almost imperceptible effects and passage show up in subject's abundant moles. *Danny* primarily addresses his future by the sensate prominence of his right ear, which stands in for the entire skin as a listening surface, implying not inward absorption but a keen awareness to the vibrations of the steps of outer world, namely ours.

For an artist who has relied so preponderantly on his eyes, Penny lately seems to declare that eyes are simply not reliable, either as win-

dows onto the world or windows into another. Eyes are too susceptible to will and desire, to weariness and defect, excellent at picking out incident but immediately turn information over to a selfish, faulty mind. Such thoughts register in looking at *Michael*, positively delighted with his corrective spectacles, or the bashful, quizzical, somewhat down-cast anamorph, *Self Stretch*.

Evan Penny lives and works in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. His work has been exhibited widely in Canada and internationally, most recently at the Centra de Cultura Contemporania de Barcelona, Spain, the FLAG Art Foundation, New York City, and the TrépanierBaer Gallery, Calgary, Alberta, Canada with Stephan Balkenhol. Upcoming exhibitions include, beginning in May of 2011, *Rendering Realities* a traveling retrospective curated by Daniel Schreiber for the Kunsthalle Tubingen, Tubingen, Germany. His work is represented in private and public collections worldwide including the Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York; The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario; the Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio; Glenbow, Calgary, Alberta, and the National Portrait Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, to name a few.

*Top Left:*  
**Michael (Variation # 2)** (2010)  
Silicone, pigment, hair, aluminum  
Sculpture: 158 x 114 x 71 cm

*Top Right:*  
**Self-Stretch (Variation #3)** (2010)  
Silicone, pigment, hair,  
aluminum, custom-made pedestal  
Sculpture: 102 x 35.5 x 35.5 cm

*Bottom:*  
**Back of Danny #1** (2007)  
Bronze and patina, Edition 2/5  
61 x 71 x 15 cm



## CHRIS MILLAR

Is nothing sacred? Chris Millar's *There Is Always the Potential for Pizza Tomorrow*, a wee 36 x 41 centimeters for all its packed-in details, looks to be copied from a screen grab of "Sofia Coppola's 'Marie Antoinette,' The Video Game" as played with standard Kirsten Dunst avatar, wardrobe by Yinka Shonibare, MBE. This truly would spell one end to the Age of Enlightenment.

Can one do anything but applaud the adroitly layered achronicity of Millar's art? Over Kirsten-Marie's left shoulder Millar has painted an imaginary tapestry that depicts a light moment with the queen and her cat during an *ancienne noblesse* photo-op. Over her right shoulder is a bucolic log cabin scene apropos of a black velvet wall hanging. Millar's extra-fine-gauge brushwork and air-brush work, the pitch-perfect precision with which each object tinkles into place, the wit that irrepressibly embellishes and frames the construction, all speak to the devotions of an obsessive.

Millar's art is buoyed by his relative youth; satire abounds but not cynicism. Millar rates his works as "'post-interesting' they refuse neat resolution as narratives or avant-garde criticality; rather, they celebrate the absurd, the excessive, the decorative, bad-taste, failure and ultimately, time well spent – as the laboriousness of the process is disproportionate to the 'substance.'" The title, which seemed diffi-

cult to connect to any visible aspect of the tableau, suddenly falls into place. It is a motivational note to self. Millar has happily plunged into the deep end of his teeming psyche. Today, calls on alert readings to every bizarre, enigmatic and contradictory signpost that pops into his mind's eye view, a labyrinthine course to be mapped, perhaps a way in, perhaps a way out, complete and utter attention to the zone he is in. But hold that thought: there is always the potential for pizza, tomorrow.

Chris Millar lives and works in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. His work has been exhibited widely throughout Canada, the US and Europe. Most recently in two group exhibitions titled, *It Is What It Is, Recent Acquisitions of New Canadian Art*, National Gallery of Canada and *Timeland: 2010 Alberta Biennale of Contemporary Art* curated by Richard Rhodes for the Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton. His work is in many private and public collections around the world including, The National Gallery of Canada, and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

*Top:*  
**There is Always the Potential for Pizza Tomorrow** (2010)  
Acrylic, styrene, metal, wood panel  
36 x 41 cm

*Bottom:*  
**Boiyd Howses** (2007)  
Installation view

*All photos courtesy TrépanierBaer and John Dean.*

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■ ■ **TrépanierBaer**



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