

# Resistance is Fertile

**Dana Claxton, Thirza Cuthand  
Richard Fung , Shani Mootoo  
Ho Tam, Paul Wong**

**Curated by Steve Loft**

**Coordinated by Brenda Goldstein**



Opening Reception Thursday June 17, 7 – 9 pm

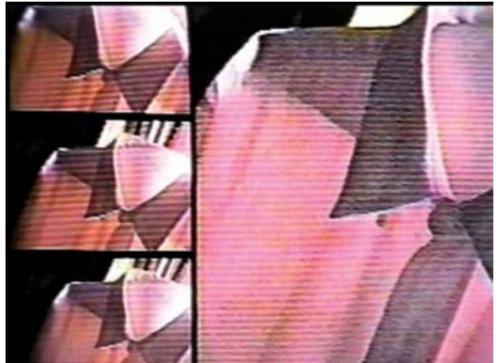
**Co-presented with ON.Fire, the Independent Media Arts Alliance 2010  
National Conference and Festival**

## Resistance is Fertile

*Resistance is Fertile* brings together works dating from the 1980s to the present, by artists who have taken on Canadian identity politics with intelligence, insight, and biting humour.

Identity as expressed here is a complex narrative, woven up in personal as well as communal histories. But it is also the culmination of lived experience. These artists work from a history grounded in the colonial experience, each with a distinct point of view. There is an aesthetic that has developed in spite of – and in juxtaposition to – cultures of oppression and repression, yet still manage to stay damn funny. Here, the humour is pointed and unrepentant – a fearless kick at the colonial ass. Sometimes subtle, sometimes bawdy, it is a rejection of the sacrosanct white story, laden with satire and poignancy. These are works that confounded perceptions of “otherness” while affirming new voices and presence in contemporary Canadian media art.

Roland Barthes, in referring to identification in a class society, wrote that “the petit-bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other. If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him, into himself.” But the artists in this exhibition brook no transformation, accept no denial, and abhor ignorance. There is a voice of myriad inflections, subtleties, and complex narratives. They choose instead to blind with their miraculous and manifold colours.



Dana Claxton, *The Shirt*, 1994, 6:27min

Each of these artists has used the medium of video to examine his or her own identity using a variety of modes of production ranging from performance for the camera to collage work and hybrid forms that encompass experimental narrative and documentary. Through their groundbreaking work, these artists build on the foundations of the 1970s video revolution using the accessibility of the medium and non-exclusive practices to create new aesthetics and, with them, space for new definitions and identities.



Paul Wong, *60 Unit Bruise*, 1976, 4:30min

Paul Wong enacts a visceral bonding ritual in *60 Unit Bruise* which, in retrospect, becomes a dangerous and disturbing act able to draw on the fear evoked by AIDS. Specifically conceived for colour video – an innovation at the time – it bears the influence of several artistic genres popular in the 1970s, including performance and body art. We see Ken Fletcher draw several millilitres of blood from his arm and inject the contents of the syringe into Paul Wong’s back, just under the skin. The camera closes in on this, observing the slow response of the body as the skin turns red and purple.



Richard Fung, *Chinese Characters*, 1986, 20:30min

Richard Fung's *Chinese Characters* and Ho Tam's *The Yellow Pages* take aim at how the concepts "Asian" and "male" are constituted in North American cultural contexts and in the mass media. Using fantasy voice-overs, staged interviews, and humorous re-enactments of scenes from Joe Gage porn classics, Fung forces viewers to question their own narrow definitions of what constitutes gay desire. Tam explores the history of immigration and its implications using material adapted from the ubiquitous directory of businesses.

Both Shani Mootoo and Dana Claxton use humour to invert colonial idealizations and orthodoxies. In *English Lessons*, Mootoo questions linguistic notions of "right" and "wrong" and examines the colonization of language through "Professor" Bernard Fernandes as he teaches his audience to speak Trinidadian-style English. Claxton's *The Shirt* is a powerful allegory, a reflection on colonial processes and concepts imposed with the arrival of white settlers in North America. The video presents a visual study of a white shirt that gets washed ashore. Using layered images, Claxton is able to animate this moment, illustrating how the shirt comes with concepts of time, money, the written word, religion, and oppression. Claxton deconstructs the colonial project, laying it bare for all to see.



Shani Mootoo, *English Lesson*, 1991, 2:45min



Ho Tam, *The Yellow Pages*, 1994, 7:40min

In *Through the Looking Glass* – starring "Cosmosquaw" as the Red Queen, Shawna Dempsey as the White Queen, and Thirza Cuthand as Alice – Cuthand examines the complications imposed by the notions of "halfbreed" and "race" as Alice is pulled in contradictory directions by the Red Queen and the White Queen.

This show is meant as a reflection on past practices. It is an homage to artists as cultural revolutionaries, to change wrought by art, and a reminder that the

"official" face of Canada is still a pale one. It prompts the question: Who are today's cultural revolutionaries, and where are their voices heard?

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Dana Claxton** is an interdisciplinary artist. Her Canadian solo exhibitions have appeared at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, the Art Gallery of Hamilton, and the Vancouver Art Gallery. Claxton's international exhibitions have appeared at the Museum of Modern Art and Guangdong Museum of Art in Guangzhou, China.

**Ho Tam** was born in Hong Kong and educated in Toronto. He works in a variety of disciplines including painting, video, photography, print and public art and has exhibited in various cities across North America. Since 1994, Tam has produced over 15 videos. Tam teaches at the University of Victoria.

**Richard Fung** is video artist, writer, theorist, and educator. An internationally exhibiting artist, Richard is a past Rockefeller Fellow at New York University. He has received the Bell Canada Award for Lifetime Achievement in Video, as well as the Toronto Arts Award. He is Associate Professor at the Ontario College of Art and Design.

**Thirza Cuthand** produces experimental videos and films. Her work has been shown at the Walter Art Centre, the Mackenzie Art Gallery, Oberhausen International Short Film Festival, the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, the Women's Television Network, MIX NY, the Walter Phillips Gallery, and the Mendel Art Gallery, among others.

**Shani Mootoo** is a poet, novelist, and visual and video artist. Mootoo's film and video work has been exhibited internationally including at the MOMA. Her acclaimed first novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, was published in 14 countries and was a finalist for the Giller Prize.

**Paul Wong** has had extensive international exhibitions including the 2003 Venice Biennale and the Museum of Modern Art. In 1995, he had a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada. Paul Wong received the Bell Canada Award in Video Art in 1992 and the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts in 2005.

**Brenda Goldstein's** films and videos have screened at Canadian and international festivals and venues, including the Kasseler Dokumentarfilm- und Videofest, and the PDX Film Festival. Recently, Toronto's Mercer Union and the Images Festival presented a solo show of her installation, *Hereafter*.

**Steven Loft** is a Mohawk of the Six Nations. He is the Executive Director of the imagineNATIVE Film and Media Arts Festival. Loft was the first Curator-In-Residence, Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada where he curated several exhibitions. His 2008 curated program for imagineNATIVE, *Culture Shock*, also screened at the Berlin International Film Festival.

front: **Thirza Cuthand**, *Through the Looking Glass*, 1999, 13:54min

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