

# Q&A: Barry Doupé

Curator Deborah de Boer in conversation with Barry Doupé  
on *Folded Paintbrush: Digital Works & Sculptures*

**DdB:** Barry, we first met in 2019 when you attended Antimatter with the world premiere of *Distracted Blueberry*, your gorgeous, alarming and epic durational film. We'd never showed a piece of that length (273 minutes!) and narrative complexity—so many scenarios, arcs and events occur and tonality shifts profoundly as the film carries viewers along. What were your thoughts and/or expectations going into the screening? After?

**BD:** When *Distracted Blueberry* screened at Antimatter I was thrilled that a highly regarded festival that I had never shown at before had accepted to screen the work. Reflecting on that time, it became clear to me that the experience of making and showing a film is a kind of ecosystem. When I make a film, I'm not always thinking about what will happen to it afterward. After you make a film, a festival will agree to show it. Then it screens and people watch it. But what happens after that? I think this unknown part is the part that interests me the most. I'm happy if there's discourse. But even if there's discourse, and everything went well, I'm somehow still not completely satisfied. I'm giving over this thing. What is it that will be returned to me? What have I lost? Because what I really want from art is for it to attach my life to itself. To knit life together with life. Make it bigger. With *Distracted Blueberry*, it was like introducing something alien into the ecosystem. A film that didn't know it was a film. It just happens. It clogs up the cycle of the ecosystem. Like a problem that needs solving.

My impression of Antimatter was that it was a very well programmed, and Victoria is lucky to have such a festival. Everything I saw there intrigued me and was put together with a curatorial rigour. In Vancouver, we don't have an experimental festival, but we do have ongoing experimental film programming through DIM Cinema, a wonderful monthly screening series programmed by Michèle Smith. More recently Xinema, a monthly screening series devoted to experimental film and coordinated by Celina de Leon and Sidney Gordon has been putting together some very good screenings that highlight local BC filmmakers.

**DdB:** I love your analogy of work as something alien in an ecosystem and films that do not know they are films. How do these ideas or mutations relate to—or become—your drawings and object-based work? What are these various disparate things, films, drawings, sculptures to each other and to you? What are the benefits of problem solving vs the avoidance of problems altogether?

**BD:** By nature, animation pulls together many forms of art making into itself. As I'm working on a film idea, I'll often make preliminary sketches or maquettes in one form and then translate it into another. Sometimes the dominant idea for a scene is actually a sound idea or a language idea. As I'm doing this I also become curious about the possibilities that each of these art forms holds. There are certain limitations and strengths that each one has in their own right, and they don't always pertain to the limits and possibilities of animation. So, I'm curious and excited about those problems and how to solve them. The ideas that I find myself drawn to are often quite different from one medium to another, and this lets me learn more about how I want to work as an artist. I do think of animation as the form that I have devoted myself the most to, and the one that I love the most. I love it because it challenges me in ways that connect me to the nature of communication and other people. The way that I'm communicating with the world and to the world feels most fluid but also the most challenged. Switching working methods can also offer respite and space to reflect on what you've done. For example, I took eight months off working on *Distracted Blueberry* to make these digital paintings after needing to rethink the direction that film was taking.

**DdB:** You are in an art band called Strawberry with Dennis Ha and other alternating co-conspirators. To me Strawberry is so enigmatic as to be spectral. What can you tell me or show me about the project and how it relates to your other artistic output?

**BD:** Strawberry is a musical side project for both Dennis and I. It's a place where we can throw around fun ideas to each other and see what sticks. We typically create a new set of songs for each performance that we do, and for whatever reason we don't have much documentation of our performances or songs. We take it seriously, but because it's a side project we haven't devoted much time to promote it. We've performed at art events and galleries in Vancouver like ArtRock?, Vancouver Art Book Fair, Or Gallery, 221A, Robson Square, ArtSpeak Radio Digest, Yactac and Peanuts Gallery. Our roles are typically reversed, so that I write the lyrics that Dennis sings, and Dennis writes the melody that I play. I think there's a natural curiosity that forms when you give something to someone to do and they transform it and make it their own. That gives us momentum and plays to each of our strengths. We've also had guests perform with us like art historian Marie-France Berard whom we met at a Vancouver Art Gallery guided tour. We liked her voice and manner, and asked her if she'd like to join our band for a performance. That was one of my favourite experiences. Since Dennis and I are both a bit shy, doing these public performances and working with other people requires us to overcome that.

**DdB:** Can you tell me why you chose to use an Amiga computer in your drawing practice? What are its strengths and limitations?

**BD:** I was introduced to the Amiga in 2012 when I was approached by the Toronto Animated Image Society to take part in a group show called *Hello Amiga!* that would utilize several Amiga consoles they had in their office. Since I'm located in Vancouver I used an emulator, but the functions are all the same as a stand-alone computer. There is a large community of people that work to archive and maintain the emulator and programs that came out for it. I was intrigued and began trying out different ones that I found archived in a community site. It was a console targeted towards artists and gameplay, so there are many programs that can do 2D and 3D graphics. The program that I felt most drawn to is the Electronic Arts developed Deluxe Paint. It seems like a simple

program, but it's not. It's basic, but it's not simple. It can do a lot of things. The more I work with it the more I figure out how to do. It's limited depending on the image mode you're working in, but the mode I'm working in is limited to 256 indexed colours. There are no layers, but there is a spare page that you can work on and transfer things over from. The other thing that I feel limited by is the way that I can create gesture. I can't create a truly gestural brush stroke that holds the energy of a quick mark the way that a pencil or paintbrush can. This is because the image is zoomed in on due to the screen resolution. I'm working closely and navigating around the image in different levels of detail. This summer I have been trying out different programs, but in the end I returned to Deluxe Paint. It feels good to move the colours around. That's it. It's designed in a way that makes sense to me. Other programs don't have this same feeling. New programs have too many options. I've started working in a larger image size: 12x16". That, in combination with what and how to draw poses a significant challenge.

**DdB:** I find your work to be both intricate and expansive. You seem very adept at seeing and imagining both micro and macrocosmically. What is the most delicate thing you have thought of making or have made? The most epic?

**BD:** I'm thinking about matter and antimatter and the delicate miracle that the space that I'm taking up could have just as easily been taken up by something else. Unlike objects, living things are more than just the space they take up. They have an inside. This inside and outside form an intersection that I am observing and interacting with. A place that never gets full. Things are coming in and going out, and I sort through it all to create a relationship to it. The most fluid place I find myself doing this is through writing. Most of the things that I've made start in some way from writing. It's the blood of my art making. It's easily the most delicate and epic aspect of how I relate to things. I have a large archive of creative writing that I draw on to help form dialogue, lyrics or just as a free form thinking space to work out ideas. Most of it remains unpublished, but I have read from it during artist talks and published excerpts from it in art publications. I would one day in the future like to make an artist book out of it, but I'm waiting for the right time and place to do it. At this time it feels freest in the dark, unpublished and left to permutate like bacteria.