As an exhibition, EVERY LINE & EVERY OTHER LINE brings together the work of five Canadian artists working, in one way or another, with portraiture. However, this is not a simple show involving pictures of friends, lovers, strangers. These portraits, directly and circuitously, consider the face as a site of colonization, a document of control, a space of power. EVERY LINE & EVERY OTHER LINE seeks to investigate how these artists have chosen to concentrate on the mouth in their portraits and what each artist is offering by focusing their lens this way. Exhibited in concert, we can ask what the mouth produces in terms of truth, consequence, renewal, aging, beauty, lies.

In gathering works by Cathy Busby, Brendan Fernandes, Bruce LaBruce, Suzy Lake, and Arthur Renwick the aim is for a conversation to occur pertaining to how each face acts as a politicized site -- that of manipulation but also revolution. Are these mouths censored or celebrating? Whose histories are spoken, and whose are left silent? What are the ways we can read a face, and what will it tell us?

... the face is, above all, the passion of revelation, the passion of language. [...] it can be a mask of closure and disdain or a passionate openness to others, a gaze that bears witness to our being together, the only location of community, the only possible city.

Since 2004, Cathy Busby has been using the realm of public apology as a site for investigating conceptual portraiture as well as the compiling of an archive of confession. In her ongoing series, Sorry, Busby has used her research skills to uncover and highlight celebrities, CEOs, politicians, religious leaders, and everyday people in states of apology as captured by various media sources. By photographing, or screen capturing, their mouths during these apologies and printing them much larger than life, she pinpoints how the act itself is so easily transferable, especially in our hyper-digital world. For EVERY LINE & EVERY OTHER LINE the artist has compiled a Winnipeg-specific iteration of her project, placing further emphasis on both superficial and consequential apologies, which is shown here in addition to a selection of other admissions of guilt she has gathered over the years. This local research acts as a portrait of a community using the trope of the apology. For example, a pursed-lipped Brian Mulroney, in his role as Prime Minister, acknowledges the responsibility of our government for the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. As the accompanying printed matter prepared by the artist clarifies, 'The work of gaining this apology was lead by Art Miki of Winnipeg.' More ridiculously, we see the Ford of Canada company attempting to back-pedal from the printing of an advert ran in a 2008 issue of Winnipeg Free Press, which pictured an SUV with a bumper sticker declaring the phrase "Drive it like you stole it." According to a CBC story, this same paper reported the sentencing of a 15-year-old boy who killed a local cyclist while behind the wheel of a stolen truck. At the time the ad ran, Winnipeg was known as 'car-theft capital of Canada' adding a certain poignant ignorance to the slogan. To further underscore this blunder, the artist has hired a local commercial sign company to hand paint the incendiary words in our gallery window, and likewise titled the accompanying brochure listing the ten Winnipeg apologies and their contexts with the same slogan. Busby's site-specificity allows the breadth of her project to inhabit various environments simultaneously; private to public, local to global, sacred to profane, and of course the spoken to the widely-published.
The language of action is spoken on the body ... He is therefore able to associate the cry he hears from another's mouth, the grimace he sees upon that other's face, with the same representations that have, on several occasions, accompanied his own cries and movements. He is able to accept this mimesis as the mark and substitute of the other's thoughts.

In direct opposition to the tightly-cropped mouths as seen in Busby's work are the full, yet contorted, faces present in the series, Mask by Arthur Renwick who is of the Haisla First Nation. In this context, and especially in relation to Busby's repellant leaders, these studio portraits of Indigenous actors and artists offer a counterpoint allowing the face as a location for protest to occur. Created by way of intended mimicry of racist stereotypes, these large format photographs capture both an intended awkward playfulness and its underlying sadness. A response to such typecasting they encounter, the Aboriginal people act out for Renwick's lens, and in fact do embody certain depictions associated with their cultures: Monique (2006), with one hand pulling at her lip to reveal a row of teeth, and the other hand obscuring her eye while manipulating her nose calls to mind wooden and leather masks used in West Coast ceremonies. Michael (2009) similarly compresses his face from the forehead to the chin with both hands, turning his eyes into slits and pulling his mouth down, exposing his tongue. These acts of studio performance blur the traditional portrait while toying with the history of colonial photography, which sought to document a supposed dying race prior to their extinction. For Renwick, Mask doubles as both a celebratory comment on the living culture of his friends and associates, as well as a protest to those who continue to misrepresent them.

I'll move my lips like almost everybody that doesn't know how to pray does when they make themselves out to be holy. I'll move my lips.

In her series, Beauty at a Proper Distance (2001 - 2005), photo-conceptualist veteran Suzy Lake adopts mainstream advertising media techniques such as glossy print commercials and billboards for beauty products, only to subvert them by picturing her own aged mouth, complete with post-menopausal hair. At a distance, as the title suggests, the red lipstick and provocative open mouth in the triptych In Song (2002) reads as enticing and perhaps an embodiment of the sexually laden advertisements for cosmetics and other feminine products. However, once sufficiently drawn in the viewer is faced with the truth that women of a certain age produce more testosterone and less estrogen resulting in menopause, culminating in postmenopausal hair growth, among other realities. With a long history of incorporating her body throughout her practice, often in unsuspecting ways, Lake now uses the same tools she has always had at her disposal and exploits what they offer in a brand new way. She has had to wait for this opportunity, and is taking full advantage of it. By focusing on her mouth, and the hair surrounding it, she delivers a reading of how women's bodies are at once targeted (as commercial trade) and betrayed (for existing as they are) by popular media.

You may nail your mouth shut, you may cut out your tongue, can you keep yourself from existing? Will you stop your thoughts.

In a self-portrait that was in fact shot by another (Ricky Castro), the Canadian filmmaker / photographer / writer / author of homoerotic punk fanzines, Bruce LaBruce, channels a style more closely related to Hollywood headshots than the product-driven marketing of Lake's inspiration. Of course what the silver screen has done is turn artists into commodity, and the unitled 10" x 8" image on cardstock (circa 1992) shows LaBruce from chest up, shirtless, posed with both fists in the frame positioned just below his chin, in irresistible defiance of consumption. His face is half in shadow, forcing a double take from the audience to realize his lips have been sewn closed. LaBruce’s eyes stare intently right out of the frame. The precise crisscrossing of the thin thread forces his lips almost into a pout. The artist's famous punk aesthetic shines through in this nod to celluloid
A portrait is a painting with something wrong with the mouth.  

In order to read the two-channel video work by Brendan Fernandes, Foe (2008), as a portrait, it requires some brief back-story. Born in Kenya and of Indian heritage, Fernandes immigrated to Canada as a child in the 1990s. On one monitor, we see the artist videotaped receiving a voice lesson from a dialect coach in order to learn the inflections connected to his associated regions: East African, South Asian, Central Canadian. He is reciting a particularly distressing passage from J. M. Coetzee novel, Foe, which was written as a sequel to Daniel Dafoe’s 18th Century novel, Robinson Crusoe. The video shows Fernandes attempting the lines describing that one of the characters, Friday, has had his tongue cut out. As the native character, embodying the other among colonials on the island, we are to question whether or not Friday is simply an imbecile or one who is without speech. On the adjacent monitor is a single shot of a shoreline at a time of rolling tide. Together, the stuttering, frustrated mouth spitting out the repetition of lines with the alternating inflection and the coveted, escapist and excluding water articulates multiple positions and calls attention to the correlation between place and agency; acknowledging the two are not mutually exclusive.

THERE ARE SO MANY LINES. LINES WE CROSS, OR ARE CROSSED BY AND DIVIDED ALONG. THERE ARE PICK UP LINES AND (POLITICAL) PARTY LINES. THERE ARE THE LINES WE RECITE WITHOUT EVEN REALIZING IT. EVERYDAY-LINES WE RATTLE OFF TO ACQUAINTANCES, FRIENDS, LOVERS, AND TO NO ONE SPECIAL IN PARTICULAR. THERE ARE ALSO THE LINES WE TELL OURSELVES: EVERYTHING WILL BE OK. THINGS WILL TURN OUT. THAT WASN'T SO BAD. NEXT TIME IT'LL BE DIFFERENT. SOMETIME AGO, THE WORLD'S KNOWLEDGE, MORE OR LESS, WAS PUT ONLINE. THEN THERE ARE THE PHYSICAL LINES ... CROWS' FEET AT THE CORNER OF OUR WELL-WORN EYES. SIMILARLY, LAUGH LINES AND OTHER WRINKLES ACROSS OUR FACES. THE LINES LEFT BY SCARS -- RECEIVED ACCIDENTALLY IN CLUMSY ENDEAVOURS, INFLECTED THROUGH HOSTILITY, THOSE LEFT FOLLOWING SURGICAL PROCEDURES OR MOMENTS OF SELF-INFLECTED INQUIRY. THERE ARE TERRITORIAL LINES, MARGINS AND SHORELINES. A SHADOW IS ALSO A LINE. A SCRIPT IS FULL OF LINES. A CHORUS LINE. A TATTOO IS AN IMAGE INKED INTO THE SKIN, EXECUTED USING A SERIES OF TINY PUNCTURES THAT MAKE UP A LINE. THESE LINES EXIST, AND WILL NOT BE GOING ANYWHERE ANYTIME SOON. THERE IS EVERY LINE & EVERY OTHER LINE.

J.J. Kegan McFadden
Director / Curator
Exhibition
18 March - 07 May 2011
Artist Talk with Suzy Lake @ The University of Manitoba’s School of Art [Art Barn, 2nd floor]
Wednesday 16 March | 7PM
Opening Reception
Friday 18 March | 7PM
Artist Talk with Cathy Busby @ Mentoring Artists for Women’s Art [611 Main Street]
Thursday 24 March | 7PM
Curatorial Tour
Saturday 23 April | 3PM
Artist Talk with Brendan Fernandes @ PLATFORM
Saturday 07 May | 3PM

ENDNOTES

1. Giorgio Agamben, Means without End (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, translation by V. Binetti and C. Casarino) p 91


4. Jean-Paul Sartre, No Exit, act 1, Sc. 5, (Gallimard, 1947). Inés reiterating to Garcin that they cannot ignore one another.

5. John Singer Sarget

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