

# When the Mood Strikes Us...

Abbas Akhavan + Marina Roy  
Paul Butler  
Larry Glawson  
Jeremy Shaw  
Colleen Wolstenholme

**Since Charles Baudelaire's first experiments with hashish and opium in 19<sup>th</sup> Century France to Aldous Huxley's documentations of mescaline trips in *The Doors of Perception* (1954), artists and researchers alike have explored the poetics of production once altered by narcotics.** When the Mood Strikes Us... is comprised of a small group of Canadian artists with international reputations who employ photo-based media as part of their artistic practice. This project explores the poetics of altered states as a means of escape, forgetfulness, indulgence and wonderment vis-à-vis artistic production. The term 'altered' may refer to a variety of narcotic-induced states brought about by alcohol, as well as street and/or prescription drugs. Other key aspects that come through in this exhibition are the unconscious as a means of creating work; meditations on the blackout, the slippage and the search; as well as understanding the artist as producer, critic and consumer within a system of referents. Each work in this exhibition stems from a response to the larger history of art in contemporary society.

Shot on location behind The Empress Hotel in Victoria, British Columbia, Abbas Akhavan and Marina Roy's video, "Victoria Day (Bombay Sapphire)" (2002), is rife with allusions to a larger concern of territories, traditions, and colonization. Watching the dapper duo sip (and chug) gin from tea cups allows the viewer to meditate on what else is offered – the bucolic location, leading to the industrial port harbour just off in the distance where ships are coming and going, delivering wares and perhaps importing customary items; the alcohol of choice, which represents the ultimate symbol of British rule in colonized India. As this performance persists, the pair begins to show signs of inebriation, giggling to one-another; they stick to their pouring, in a quasi-erudite manner staving off the impending blackout. Just as Akhavan finally succumbs to the affect of imbibing, Roy shuffles clumsily to the tripod and turns off the camera in a final act of rupture between performer and voyeur.

In his photograph, "One Hit of White Clinical Acid (after Malevich, for Optimists)" (2006), Jeremy Shaw references the Russian-born artist and theoretician, Kazimir Severinovich Malevich (1878-1935), who had developed the Suprematism movement and in fact had painted a white-on-white painting in 1918. Fundamental tenets in the Suprematism manifesto promote the abstract form in art, most often executed by a circle-square relationship. In offering this image of a larger-than-life hit of acid, Shaw alludes to the possibilities it holds – endless trips, good and bad, escape, religious ecstasy, and all the utopic / dystopic trappings. This c-print is paired with Shaw's ready-made, "Anti-Psych (Total Blacklight)" (2005), tht is quite literally a blacklight bulb broken it its socket. With this gesture, the artist references simultaneously the search for utopia and escape that proliferated in rumpus rooms throughout the psychedelic trips popularized in the 1960s and 70s, and the total despair of the current generation of addicts who use broken bulbs to smoke methamphetamine – popularly known as 'crystal meth.'

Similarly, Paul Butler offers two videos that allude in different ways to the idea of escape. Though distinctive on many levels, "Steaks N Blunts" (1997) and "Smoking in Bed with Your Shoes On" (2008) act as bookends in a way ... respectively, they represent the artist's first and latest work in the medium. It should be noted that Butler's method of minimal camerawork combined with ambient audio – from the droning noise of a washing machine off-kilter, to the lull and twang of Bob Dylan's 1997 song 'Make You Feel My Love' – work in tandem to support his meditative states. The former, an ambiguous portrait of slacker hedonism loosely informed by the short-lived contest among stoners attempting to wait for the meat to cook properly on the grill while munchies have begun to set in, slowly paves the way for the later more melancholic tribute from a somewhat older and mellowed artist. Each video relates differently to a domestic setting. The washing machine in Butler's early work is seen, through hazy eyes, almost as otherworldly, while the night sky through the window in his recent work presents the possibility of grandeur.

Presenting an intensified relationship to the domestic, Glawson's animation "My Pie" (2008) offers a small glimpse of his ongoing investigation into his home life with his longtime partner. A metaphor for cravings – physical, psychological, sexual – the endless loop of pies twirling, spinning, shaking, and disappearing elicits an entirely different reaction in the context of this exhibition. This pulsating circular projection refers to hallucinations for some, meditations for others, and perhaps even an all-seeing third eye in certain cases. Stemming from a bout of munchies, and in an attempt to synthesize (home)life with his artistic practice, Glawson began baking and documenting pies, often incorporating them into various presentations of his ongoing, and significantly larger, *home bodies* series. It should come as no surprise that a

meditative exercise, such as late-night baking, also presents numerous plays on the search for escape, as well as meaning and fulfillment in the mundane.

Concerned less with escape than with the establishment's need for control, Colleen Wolstenholme began her series of pillworks. With "Spill" (1997), Wolstenholme re-imagines a spill of mood elevators as stand-ins for figurative sculpture. These impossibly over-sized carvings of Xanax, Dilaudid, Paxil, Laratine, and BuSpar populate the gallery with a ghost-like presence. In a society where we have moved on from "you are what you eat" to "you are what you've been prescribed", the metaphor is apt. These medications, a mixture for ailments such as anxiety and depression, have also been widely used in recreational settings. Derived from her "Spill" work is a series of digital c-prints, "Pill Mandala" (1999), which point to the artist's further critique into pill culture. These cocktails, comprising pills for anxiety, depression, and birth control form various geometric patterns against coloured backgrounds and in turn relate to psychedelia as well as religion, while prompting the viewer to consider the over-prescription of such medications, especially to women in contemporary society.

Although ostensibly about taking drugs, the work presented goes much deeper than that: Butler's videos refers to the angst of middle-class/suburban boredom in Winnipeg (but by no-means specific to his locale); Glawson's projection stills are influenced by domesticity and sexual cravings; Akhavan + Roy's performance video is highly-influenced by colonial land settlements and outmoded bourgeois tradition; Shaw's photograph makes reference to the Modernist cannon while at the same time pays homage to the search for enlightenment whereas his ready-made epitomizes the generation gap of drug users; and Wolstenholme's photographic and sculptural work comment on the over-prescription of mood elevators in contemporary society, especially as it may refer to women's health issues.

In presenting these artworks together, my aim is for there to be a play from one piece to the next, connecting them but also disjointing them in order for the gallery to act as a place for elaborations on the themes presented. I want the viewer to have an experience with the work... for the gallery to act as conduit where dream states and mental voyages might occur. In this context each work may be read individually or as part of the group — allowing for a cohesive look at the narco-poetics of culture production in a larger socio-political context.

-J.J. Kegan McFadden  
Director / Curator

## Exhibition

Friday 12 September – Friday 24 October 2008

## Reception

7PM Friday 12 September

**Panel Discussion** with Abbas Akhavan, Marina Roy, and Colleen Wolstenholme

2PM Saturday 13 September [co-sponsored by MAWA]

## Curator's Tour

2PM Saturday 27 September

## List of Works

Abbas Akhavan + Marina Roy

"Victoria Day (Bombay Sapphire)" (2002) video projection, 41:00

Paul Butler

"Steaks N Blunts" (1997) single-channel video, 5:32. Courtesy of Video Pool Media Arts Centre.

"Smoking in Bed with Your Shoes On" (2008) single-channel video, 3:21

Larry Glawson

"My Pie" (2008), digital animation projection

Jeremy Shaw

"One Single Hit White Clinical Acid (after Malevich, for Optimists)" (2006) c-print, 36" x 36"

"Anti-Psych (Total Blacklight)" (2005), Broken black light bulb, socket, and cord (dimensions variable). Courtesy of Bob Rennie Collection, Vancouver, BC.

Colleen Wolstenholme

"Pill Madala" (1999) digital print, 33" x 33" each

"Xanax" (1997) plaster carving, 8" x 36" x 10"

"Dilaudid" (1997) plaster carving, 8" x 17" diameter

"Paxil" (1997) plaster carving, 7" x 25" x 14"

"Laratine" (1997) plaster carving, 5" x 21" diameter

"BuSpar" (2000) cast hydrocal, 8" x 20" x 12"

## PLATFORM

J.J. Kegan McFadden, Director/Curator

Larry Glawson, Administrative Coordinator

Glen Johnson, Technician

Natasha Peterson, Intern

With gratitude to: The artists for their participation in this exhibition. To the Bob Rennie Collection, for loaning the re-creation rights for Jeremy Shaw's work. To the Board of Directors, and Centre staff for their unparalleled support. To Manitoba Arts Council, and The Winnipeg Arts Council for their sustained support, as well as the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation for the funds to produce this publication. Special thanks to our colleagues at Mentoring Artists for Women's Art, aceartinc., and Urban Shaman Gallery who have supported this exhibition in many ways.

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**Abbas Akhavan** was born in Tehran, Iran, and has been living in Canada for the last thirteen years. He completed his BFA (honours) at Concordia University, and MFA at the University of British Columbia. His artistic practice traverses a variety of mediums including: painting, drawing, installation, video/performance, and site-specific ephemeral works. His latest visual works are informed by food and conviviality. In recent projects he has taken to feeding his audiences cannibal cakes, painting with Ketchup, and drinking large quantities of gin. He teaches at Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design.

**Marina Roy** works in drawing, painting, sculpture, and animation. Besides her solo practice, she works collaboratively on video works with Natasha McHardy, and Abbas Akhavan. Marina holds a BA in French literature from l'Université Laval, Quebec City, a BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax, and an MFA from the University of British Columbia. She is assistant professor at the Department of Art History, Visual Art, and Theory at UBC since 2002. She has written essays and reviews for a number of art magazines, catalogues and books. Her book, *sign after the x \_\_\_\_\_*, an investigation of the letter 'X' in contemporary culture, was published in 2001 (Arsenal Pulp Press/ Artspeak), and is now being re-invented as an interactive website artwork in collaboration with artist David Clark and Graham Meisner.



**Paul Butler** is a curator, writer, and artist currently living and working in Winnipeg. Since the late 1990s he has sought to develop a practice that considers the intersections and overlaps between these disciplines. Butler's practice includes the direction of two experimental, nomadic models – The Other Gallery and The Collage Party.



**Larry Glawson** has worked out of Winnipeg as a photo-artist for the last twenty-six years. His work has been shown locally, nationally, and internationally including exhibition in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Edinburgh, New York, Helsinki, and Belgrade. He first taught photography at the University of Manitoba School of Art in 1990 and yearly since 1995, except while obtaining his MFA at the University of Western Ontario from 2000-2002. Glawson's work over the last fifteen years has been largely involved with queer identities, politics, and aesthetics. In June 2008, a major exhibition of his *home bodies* series was presented in Winnipeg.



**Jeremy Shaw** is a Vancouver artist now based in Berlin who graduated from Emily Carr Institute in 1999. One of Shaw's primary subjects has been the activities and representations of youth subcultures. His eight-screen video installation *DMT*, which shows various friends of his under the influence of the highly potent psychedelic drug Dimethyltryptamine, premiered at Presentation House Gallery in 2004. Versions of *DMT* have since been presented at the Lisson Gallery, London; Cherry and Martin Gallery, Los Angeles and the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto. Shaw's media works have been included in the group exhibitions "Video Heroes" at Saidye Bronfman Centre, Montreal and "Canada Dreaming" at Kunstverein Wolfsburg, Germany. Shaw is also an internationally-renowned electronic musician, recording under the name Circlesquare, and was released on Output Recordings (UK).



**Colleen Wolstenholme** currently lives and works in Hantsport, Nova Scotia. She holds a BFA from NSCAD and an MFA from the State University of New York. She has taught at NSCAD, SUNY, MCAD, and St Thomas University. Recent solo exhibitions include those at: Cambridge Galleries (2006), Art Gallery of Calgary (2007), Confederation Centre Art Gallery (2007), The Robert McLaughlin Gallery (2008) and Encomium Contemporary Art (now defunct) in Toronto (2005). In 2002 she made the National Shortlist for the inaugural Sobey Art Award, representing the Atlantic Region. Wolstenholme's work has been featured in C Magazine and Border Crossings. It has been covered by numerous publications including Espace, the LA Times, the New York Times, the London Sunday Times, Atlanta Journal Constitution, Harper's, People, Newsweek, and Psychology Today. Permanent collections where her work can be found include those of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Cambridge Galleries, Confederation Centre Art Gallery, and Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal.

**J.J. Kegan McFadden** is a Winnipeg-based cultural worker. A founding member of the As We Try & Sleep Collective, McFadden is a writer, curator and artist. His curatorial interests lay in the realms of relational projects, feminist and queer perspectives in culture-production and knowledge dissemination, artists' books, and interdisciplinary practices. He has contributed texts and reviews to *Border Crossings Magazine*, *C-Magazine*, *FRONT*, and *Geist*; as well as critical responses to exhibitions at **aceartinc.** (Winnipeg); **STORAGE** (Vancouver); **The New Gallery** (Calgary); and **PLATFORM: centre for photographic + digital arts**. Since 2003, his curatorial projects have been exhibited in Winnipeg at **A Label for Artists**; **Plug In ICA**; **PLATFORM**; as well as Vancouver's **Belkin Satellite**, and **Malaspina Printmakers Association**. McFadden holds a BA (Honours) in Art History from the University of Winnipeg and an MA in Art History / Critical and Curatorial Studies from the Department of Art History, Visual Art & Theory at the University of British Columbia. He is currently the Director/Curator of **PLATFORM: centre for photographic + digital arts**.