

# As the Sidewalk Bleeds

Eryne Donahue \ Mike MacDonald \ Sandee Moore \  
bpNichol \ Mike Patten \ Kristina Lee Podesva \

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."  
-- Arthur C. Clark [co-author, 2001: A Space Odyssey, 1968]

There is rupture in the work presented here. Everything in this exhibition is not as it should be. The intended use of various digital technologies has been undermined, re-imagined, manipulated, and misused in order to create these artworks. Thankfully, this is an ongoing reality in our tech-saturated existences. What is useful to the larger society is useful in an entirely different way to the individual artists whose work comprises *As the Sidewalk Bleeds*: Eryne Donahue, Mike MacDonald, Sandee Moore, bpNichol, Mike Patten, and Kristina Lee Podesva. The fallout of misuse is heavily philosophical. If we re-trace the research and development of technological advancement, much of it stems from the proliferation of war. Battle, in all of its forms, has led to the development of more household techno-gadgets than we might suspect: the camera (in all variations), alarm systems, televisions, baby-monitors, cellular phones, the Internet, and many more of which all can be attributed, in one way or another, to the unrelenting necessity of government-funded research and development in times of war. Stemming from all of this progress, the Machine has met a point where it has become both reified and completely devoured; ironically, it inspires jealousy and awe, and yet it is increasingly more and more accessible and attainable. Any new technology, particularly those of a so-called 'personal' nature [ie: personal digital assistants, cellular phones, MP3 players, ... ] is rampantly consumed practically the world-over from text messaging teenagers to Blackberry-fueled CEOs. What happens when someone looks at these devices differently? It takes artists to question the intended use of machines and suggest alternative applications.

In *First Screening* (1984), bpNichol animated a dozen or so of his concrete poems – a form he had been working in successfully for decades prior to this [mis]use of his Apple IIe. The beautiful and awkward jumping of his words across the utilitarian screen, sometimes slow, other times jerky or, still, rhythmic and dance-like, leave the viewer / reader marveling at this low-tech offering, wondering what will come next and how long this film-like chapbook may last. Originally published through the imprint, Underwhich, started in 1979 by Nichol with a small group of poets, *First Screening* consisted of 100 numbered and signed copies distributed on 5.25" floppy discs along with some related printed matter. Could this be among the first documented form of open-source file sharing in the arts?

Where Nichol was capturing his efforts in language and transferring them to the screen, artists such as Mike MacDonald and Sandee Moore use two different recording devices to capture notions of community and travel almost two decades (and 4,500+ miles) apart. **Mike MacDonald's** *Electronic Totem* (1987) acts as a portrait of the Gitksan Wetsuwet'en First Nation in British Columbia. Presented on five CRT television monitors stacked vertically atop one-another and screening multiple vantage points simultaneously from the water to the sky with a single soundtrack, this videowork reflects upon and re-imagines the role media plays in isolated communities. Television, as a democratizing force in the developed world – a bringer of information to those seeking and something to placate the under-imaginative – is now such a standard that it seems ludicrous to not have a set, or three, in any civilized home. By (mis)using this significant colonizing agent in a way that reflects the community and tells the story of the people, MacDonald has also, surely, toyed with a number of adjacent strategies from the history of art, including modernist sculpture, reportage, and portraiture.

**Sandee Moore's** video, *Keitai Tokyo* (2004) was shot entirely on an au cell phone -- a device that captures low-resolution images and video for the purposes of sending to other phones. This is 21st Century reconnaissance by the hand of an artist. On location in Tokyo, Moore – who lived there prior to the creation of this work – points her lens to tourist clichés and Japanese iconography, among various parts of contemporary life on the coast, including the ever-present commuter trains and the unrelenting precipitation. The function of this cellular telephone as a means to capture and convey visual information presents an important question -- when was it, exactly, that we decided we needed to know so much? When did letter-writing, or even email, become less-than sufficient? Now not only is there cell phone feed, but also text messaging, chat applications, and twitter in the air. These signals are in such over-abundance that 'tags' are now needed in order to classify and categorize the multitude of conversations.

Tagging, as a means of identifying uploaded messages and images is also one way of navigating the Internet. Artist and collaborator team, **Kristina Lee Podesva** with Alan McConchie, devised their ongoing web-based project, *Google Emotional Index* (GEI) with this very understanding in mind. GEI is a constantly updated website based on a re-configured use of the Google search engine. Upon entering the GEI page, the viewer has to decide which portal to investigate from a list of sixty possible emotions, ranging from 'affection' to 'humiliation' to 'terror' to 'worry' to 'yearning'. It should be noted that the "SafeSearch" filter has been removed, offering an unedited version of this rhizomatic research that ultimately provides an imprecise and somewhat astonishing view of the current zeitgeist of cyber-culture. With images as diverse as kittens playing with string to the atrocities of war and misogyny and then back to cartoon highlights and perhaps completely benign images (photographs, drawings, video stills, screen captures, and so on) GEI acts as a mirror, representing the best, worst, and utterly indifferent of our global society. As most websites are constructed to offer specific information about some enterprise or person, GEI offers no context, simply the understanding that the Internet's largest search engine stores these images and they are accessible at the click of a mouse.

Perhaps the most contentious misuse of digital technologies involves the obfuscation, rather than presentation, of information. In his series, *Lost Thoughts*, **Mike Patten** offers one such type of concealment and obliteration. Using personal notes he's scribbled into his palm pilot – the stuff of daily to-do lists – the artist strikes through the hand-written

reminders with the erase tool, leaving behind illegible, yet graphically bold, remainders of data. For Patten, the Palm Pilot became a sketchpad, culminating in black and white digital prints. His is a personal archive collected of these images created over time with no real information to impart other than what may have been there last Tuesday, last week, last year. The politics of remaining is such that any information gleaned begins to offer insights in to the past while necessarily forging ahead to attempt a life of survival. These digital works of Patten's may act as contemporary hieroglyphs, or more accurately, technoglyphs.

Working in a similarly organic style, **Eryne Donahue** creates the work in her *Saturation / Return* series by manipulating — either with finger or brush — her own saliva once deposited on the screen of a flatbed scanner. Pushing and grouping her spit into portraits of various authors, philosophers, and others found in dust-jacket photos from her bookshelf, Donahue then starts the scanner, whose humming and vibrating essentially obliterates or greatly distorts the resemblance so that the image becomes something other, something perhaps uncanny. Leaving the scanner open during the process allows for a sky blue light to shine through and be captured along with the white and grey bubbles often refracting bits of prismatic colours themselves. (Mis)using her scanner as an easel, the artist calls into question other possible applications for the horde of electronic devices currently cluttering up our earth.

The artists in *As the Sidewalk Bleeds* offer individual ruminations on the topic of the creative misuse of digital technologies. Gathered here is a cross-section of Canadian artists using everything from computers to televisions and cell phones to websites and Palm Pilots to flatbed scanners in order to produce their art. These divergent artistic concerns overlap to produce a larger conversation regarding: poetry, love, geopolitics, globalization, and the incorporation of media in the everyday. With such varied approaches to digital media, *As the Sidewalk Bleeds* also presents a multitude of political acts. To go against or re-appropriate advances in technology for the purposes of an artwork can be seen as a fundamental act of resistance / revolution / advancement / foresight / ... . Furthermore, each piece acts as a personal meditation on navigating our media-saturated time. Since the work gathered here dates from the mid-1980s until quite literally the present, *As the Sidewalk Bleeds* may be read as historical notes to understanding how we've navigated the obscene advancements in personal technologies so far.

"Reality is technologically-dependent, it changes every time new technologies invade it. [...] Art erupts when a new technology challenges the status quo."

-- Derrick de Kerckhove, *The Skin of Culture: Investigating the New Electronic Reality*  
(Somerville House Publishing, Toronto: 1995) [169 – 170]

**J.J. Kegan McFadden**  
Director/Curator

## EXHIBITION

Saturday 12 September – Saturday 24 October 2009

## OPENING RECEPTION + ARTIST TALKS

7PM Saturday 12 September

**AFTER SCHOOL SPECIAL:** a look at pedagogical practices from then to now w/Kristina Lee Podesva [Presented by FTW and The Winnipeg Free Museum, 3rd floor Artspace building]

7PM Sunday 13 September

## STUDIO VISIT W/ SANDEE MOORE

7PM Thursday 24 September

## CURATOR'S TOUR

2PM Saturday 3 October

## A / LAKE / A / LANE / A / LINE / A / LONE

An evening of readings of bpNichol's poetry co-presented by PLATFORM + THIN AIR / Winnipeg International Writers Festival featuring: **Charlene Diehl, Christoff Engbrecht, Clarise Foster, Colin Smith, David Streit, Margaret Sweatman**

7:30PM Saturday 17 October

## PLATFORM

J.J. Kegan McFadden, Director / Curator  
Larry Glawson, Administrative Coordinator  
Natasha Peterson, Outreach Coordinator  
Glen Johnson, Technician  
Alexis Lagimodière-Grisé, Intern

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many have helped in the development and presentation of this exhibition. I would like to thank the Board and Staff at PLATFORM, especially Larry Glawson, Natasha Peterson, and Glen Johnson. Other friends have offered various sources of inspiration, encouragement, and technical assistance, including: Jón Olafson, Jeanne Randolph, Freya Björg Olafson, Clint Enns, Leslie Supnet, and Amanda Cachia. We in Winnipeg are rich with colleagues willing to assist in many ways to the betterment of exhibition presentation, and I would like to thank Anthony Keindl and Daniel Ellingsen at Plug In Institute for Contemporary Art, Milena Placentile at Gallery 1C03, everyone at aceartinc, and Video Pool Media Arts Centre for their generosity and in-kind contributions to the success of this project. Jann LM Bailey and Trish Keegan at Kamloops Art Gallery were instrumental in the loan of Mike MacDonald's work. Eleanor Nichol was very gracious and quick to recognize a place for the work of her late husband, bpNichol, in my curatorial approach, and for that I am grateful. In addition, Christina Palassio at Coach House Books proved to be a great resource while researching Nichol. With the invaluable help of Charlene Diehl and The Winnipeg International Writers Festival, as well as Colin Smith, we are able to offer a reading night of Nichol's work in conjunction with this exhibition. As *the Sidewalk Bleeds* has been funded by Manitoba Arts Council, Winnipeg Arts Council, and Canada Council for the Arts, with supplementary assistance provided by The Winnipeg Foundation, and Le Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec.

The visual and literary artists involved with *As the Sidewalk Bleeds*, whose work and dedication to the field of creative misuse I am so thankful for, are: Eryne Donahue, Mike MacDonald, Sandee Moore, bpNichol, Mike Patten, Kristina Lee Podesva, Alan McConchie, Charlene Diehl, Christoff Engbrecht, Clarise Foster, Colin Smith, David Streit, and Margaret Sweatman. Thank-you. - J.J.K.McF



**PLATFORM**  
centre for **photographic + digital arts**  
121-100 Arthur St. Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada R3B 1H3  
T.204.942.8183 F.204.942.1555 platformgallery.org

**Eryne Donahue** is an artist, educator, and astrologer from Ottawa, Ontario. Her work involves repetitive gestures such as cutting and arranging, creating statistical sets and focusing in on minute details to form installations and prints that have been worked in a combination of digital and analog media. The main concern of her work has been the composite or invented portrait, which acts as a reflective surface for categorical thought and perceptive boxes. Donahue problematizes notions of the portrait, where the autonomous identity of real individuals and bodies is revealed and enlarged. Donahue's use of various photographic and print media has led to a series of explorations about how humanity is represented, remembered, and understood. Her approach is reminiscent of archival or mnemonic schematics that organize larger concepts and questions of human life into more manageable parts. She received her Master of Fine Arts in 2006 from the University of British Columbia and has since continued working in Vancouver.

<[www.erynedonahue.com](http://www.erynedonahue.com)>



*Saturation / Return suite, 2006*  
/ digital prints, 20" x 16" each, dry-mounted, series of 10  
/ Courtesy of the artist

**Mike MacDonald** [1941 in Sydney, NS – 2006 Halifax, NB] was a Canadian multi-media artist working in video, photography, installation, and on the Internet. In October 2000 MacDonald received the first Aboriginal Achievement Award for New Media based on his essay "Indians in Cyberspace" and his "Butterfly Garden" web site. He was proud of his mixed heritage including Mi'kmaq, Beothuck and European ancestry. In 1994, he was presented with the Vancouver Institute for the Visual Arts (VIVA) award, founded by Jack and Doris Shadbolt, for outstanding contribution to the arts in British Columbia. His art is exhibited extensively in Canada and the United States and has been included in several exhibitions in Europe.

*Electronic Totem, 1987*

/ five-channel video installation, DVD transfer, 20:00 [colour]  
/ Courtesy of Kamloops Art Gallery



**Sandee Moore** proposes to animate social relationships through personal exchange via artwork in media such as performance, video, installation, and interactive electronic sculpture. Since graduating from the MFA program at the University of Regina in 2003, Moore has screened and exhibited across Canada at venues including the Edmonton Art Gallery (now the Art Gallery of Alberta), The Winnipeg Art Gallery, Images Film and Video Festival, Blackwood Gallery, Dalhousie Art Gallery, and Mendel Art Gallery. Her practice has also taken her to Japan, where she was the 2004 Mukojima / Rice artist-in-residence. She was recently commissioned to create a video for the Winnipeg Art Gallery, stills of which were featured in the art pages of issue 100 of *Border Crossings* magazine. She recently stepped down from her four-year term as Director of Video Pool Media Arts Centre in Winnipeg in order to pursue her art practice on a full-time basis.



*Keitai Tokyo, 2004*

/ miniDV 3:26 [colour, stereo]

/ Courtesy of the artist and Video Pool Media Arts Centre

<[www.sandeemoore.com](http://www.sandeemoore.com)>

**bpNichol** [Barrie Phillip Nichol, Vancouver, 1944 – Toronto, 1988] During his productive lifetime, Nichol published countless chap-books and works which frequently challenged or redefined ideas of texts, books, genres and writing. Nichol worked in a variety of forms, including fiction, concrete poetry, spoken word, and computer texts. *The Martyrology*, a long poem spanning nine books in six volumes, is perhaps his most recognized work. With Steve McCaffery, he formed the Toronto Research Group, and he was a member of the Four Horsemen with McCaffery, Paul Dutton and Rafael Barreto-Rivera. In 1970, Nichol won the Governor General's Award for poetry with *Still Water*, *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid*, *Beach Head* and *The Cosmic Chef*. He shared the award with Michael Ondaatje for *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. He was a tireless promoter of poetry and small press publication, and the spirit of his work is continuing through the efforts of Karl Young, Neil Hennessey, Darren Wershler-Henry, and many others.

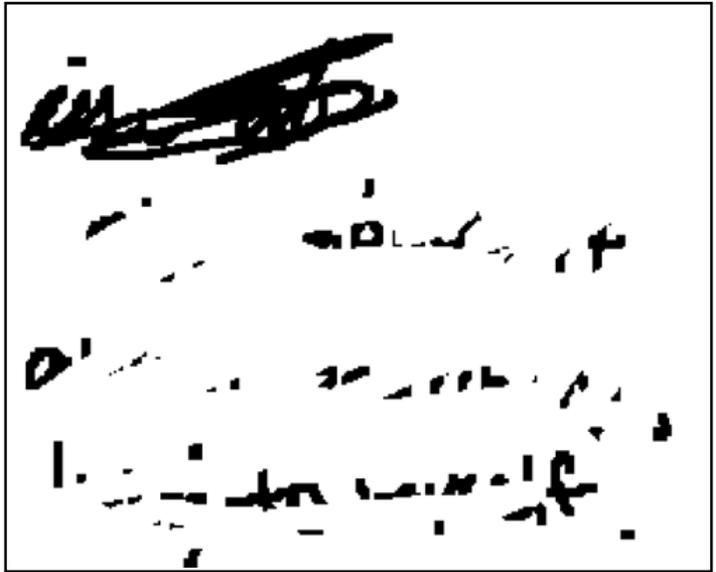
<[www.bpnichol.ca](http://www.bpnichol.ca)>



*First Screening, 1984*  
/ computer-animated poetry, 10:00 [black + white]  
/ Courtesy of The bpNichol Estate

**Mike Patten** is a multidisciplinary artist living and working in Montreal. Born in 1977 in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, of Cree and European decent, he holds a BFA in painting and drawing with a minor in art history from the University of Regina. Patten has participated in solo and group exhibitions internationally and nationally at artist run, commercial, and university galleries including: LOOP international video art Festival, (Barcelona, Spain, 2007), Neutral Ground, (Regina, SK, 2005), Pierre-François Ouellette art c o n t e m p o r a i n , (Montreal, QC, 2006) and the University of Bishops, (Lennoxville, QC, 2006).

<[www.mikepatten.ca](http://www.mikepatten.ca)>



*Lost Thoughts* series, 2006  
/ digital prints, dimensions variable  
/ Courtesy of the artist

**Kristina Lee Podesva** is an artist, writer, and curator based in Vancouver, Canada. She is the founder of colourschool, a free school within a school dedicated to the speculative and collaborative study of five colours (white, black, red, yellow, and brown) and cofounder of Cornershop Projects, an open framework for the examination of the relationship between art and economic transactions. In between things, she is Assistant Editor at The Phillip Review.

<[www.kristinaleepodesva.com](http://www.kristinaleepodesva.com)>

*Google Emotional Index*, 2006 – ongoing  
/ website  
/ Courtesy of the artist

