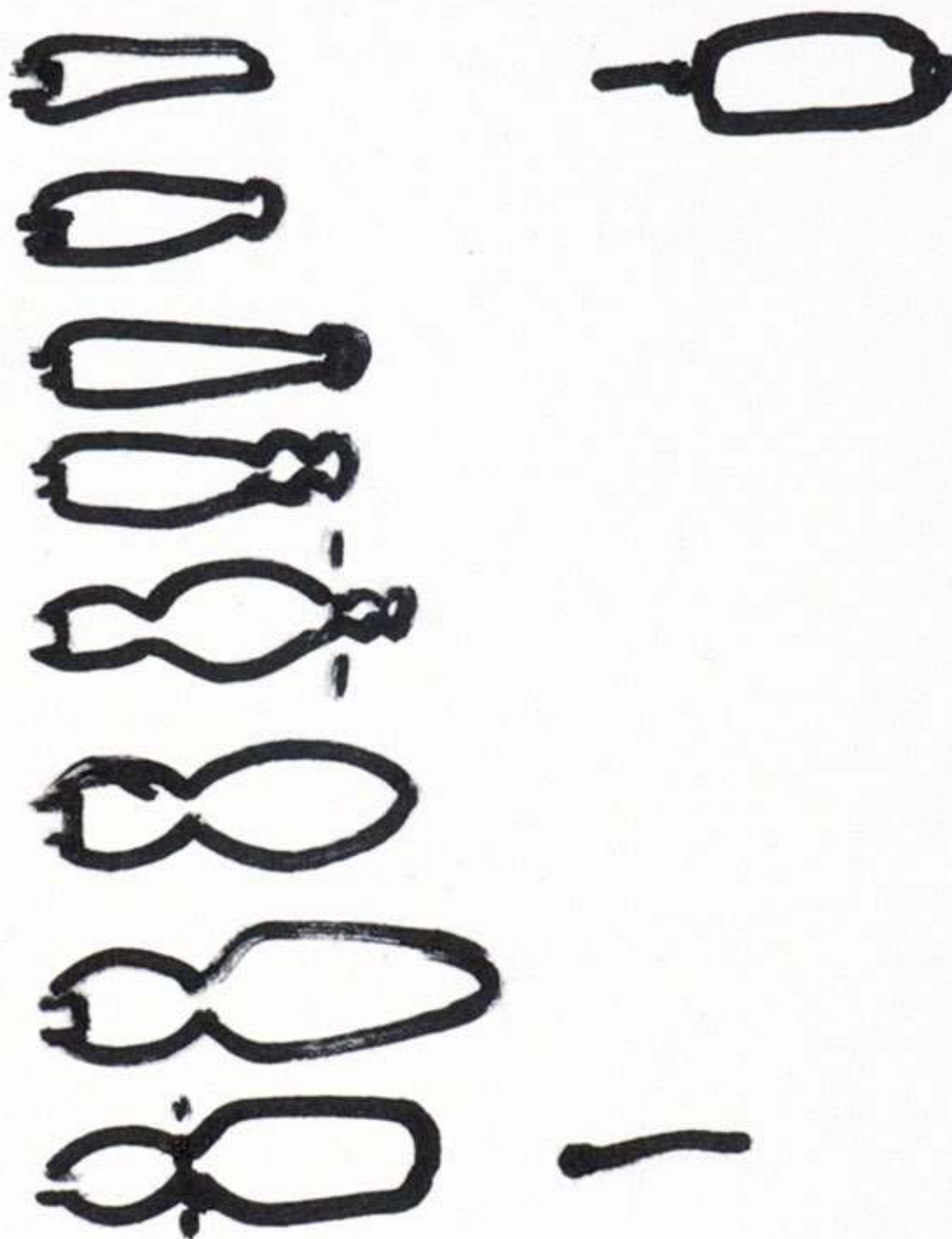


# SNAP Line

SUMMER 2015

Newsletter artist:  
GRAEME DEARDEN



WORD & IMAGE  
EDITION

CONTRIBUTIONS BY: Stephanie Bailey, Rob Harpin, Jim Johansson,  
Jennifer Konanz, Cate Kuzik, Alex Linfield & Morgan Melenka,  
Wendy McGrath & Walter Jule, Josée Aubin Ouellette, and Zach Polis

UPCOMING EVENTS:  
Blockout Block Party: June 20th  
International Visiting Artist Workshop: June 6th



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NORTHERN ALBERTA  
PRINT-ARTISTS**

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## President's Message

Welcome to our Spring 2015 edition of *SNAP Line*. Whether you love the cold winter months or just try to keep warm and endure them, there's no denying the exuberance that spring brings to us each year. At SNAP the time has flown by over the past few months, with a number of thought-provoking exhibits in our galleries and the printshop, and with a multitude of classes, workshops, and special events. In the Main Gallery Briar Craig's work *Between the Lines* coupled images with written language to create printed works with unexpected and contemplative pairings. Our Community Gallery's walls were brought to life by Ben Weinlick's colourful, strange, and amusing prints in *Ass U Me*. Our printshop walls were graced by a diversity of wonderful works by University of Alberta Senior Printmaking students and first-year graduate students with their exhibit *Please Stand By*. Be sure to join us for our upcoming exhibits this spring, Gabriela Jolowicz's *Present Density*, and SNAP Emerging Artist in Residence Daniel Evans' *Atavistic*, both opening June 4th, 7-9pm.

SNAP's Board of Directors was busy in the printshop preparing for our semi-annual fundraiser at the Royal Bison Art and Craft Fair May 8-10, 2015. Once again the Board and other volunteers have created and will be selling SNAP merchandise as a fundraiser for this event. Our studio has been quite busy, also hosting Mother's Day tea towel printing, several printmaking classes, Open Studio sessions, the Letterpress Club, and of course numerous printmakers using the space for their own work. **On June 20th SNAP will once again be holding its summer fundraiser party, Blockout – we hope to see you there!**

The Board's focus in recent months has been on completing SNAP's 5-year Strategic Plan, including spending priorities for the next several years, and this work has been augmented by our participation in the previously-mentioned series of workshops entitled *New Pathways for the Arts: Advancing Innovation and Adaptive Change in the Arts*, which has involved a broad spectrum of arts organizations within Edmonton. Long-term sustainability for our organization is a key focus in this work.

SNAP's Board has also been working on Board renewal as some of our directors are nearing the end of their terms. We have also been working on processes for evaluating Board performance, beginning with a Board self-evaluation.

If you are interested in contributing to SNAP at a governance level on the Board of Directors, please get in touch at [board@snapartists.com](mailto:board@snapartists.com). Thanks to all of our amazing volunteers, staff, sponsors and partners for your continued support.

Sincerely,  
– Lisa Matthias, President



## Executive Director's Message

Welcome to the summer edition of *SNAPLINE: The Word & Image* edition. Going forward the publications committee will be focusing the content around a theme for each edition & we're very excited to be exploring some great topics over the next year. Word & image relationships encompass so many vibrant print related topics including letterpress, Artist Books & printmaking's latent relationship to advertising. In addition we have a truly exciting word & image collaboration being premiered at SNAP gallery in September which brings together the prints of Walter Jule and poetry of Wendy McGrath in *A Revision of Forward*. *You can read more about this collaboration and upcoming exhibition & publication on page 15.*

Calgary artist Graeme Dearden works nicely around the periphery of word & image as he creates visual poetry out of the symbols and notation used for glass blowing—in his screen print translations you might get the sense that there is a sort of language developing that you can't quite decode or decipher but is visually interesting nonetheless.

Edmonton photographer Jim Johansson brightens up our centre spread with his photo essay *Desert Promotions*. Jim can also be found selling his sophisticated images at The Royal Bison Art & Craft Fair on May 08,09 & 10th. Should you be interested in becoming a SNAPline contributor please see our open call for proposals for our next two editions of this year on page 14.

As we move into summer the printshop is busier than ever and we're delighted to see a thriving community of artists make great use of our resources and unique space. We've made some great additions and advancements in the printshop this year, and will continue to make adjustments to our constant work-in-progress studio to address the needs of those accessing the space.

Prints by SNAP members will be on display at The Stanley Milner Library throughout May as the culmination of a great project put together by SNAP intern Haylee Fortin. The project saw members making small editions of 8x10 prints for an exchange and exhibition opportunities.

In June international artist Gabriela Jolowicz will travel to Edmonton from Berlin for her exhibition opening on June 5th and to facilitate a 1 day woodcut workshop on June 6th. The woodblock project from her workshop will be featured as part of our Steam Roller printing demonstration at our annual Summer Block Party–Blockout. Happening at the SNAP printshop on June 20th this event will feature great hands on DIY printing opportunities, live music, classic summer cocktails, delicious food and most importantly it celebrates our community—I hope to see you here!

– April Dean,  
Executive Director

# Graeme Dearden

SUMMER 2015 NEWSLETTER PRINT



Graeme Dearden is a Calgary fine artist and writer working primarily in printmaking, cold glass sculpting, drawing, and visual poetry. Generally his work is concerned with the creative process and how people, including himself, go about making artwork. His work often becomes the result of observing conversations that occur between people and their processes

during the long hours spent in the studio. As well as having received supplemental instruction from The Alberta Printmaker's Society and The Corning Museum of Glass, Graeme recently completed his Bachelors Of Fine Art, majoring in Glass at The Alberta College of Art + Design. So far, he has exhibited primarily in Canada and has had his work published internationally in magazines, online publications, and two visual poetry books that he authored.

## Artist Statement

**G1: So, what do you make?**

**G2:** Abstract prints and drawings. Visual poetry. Prose poetry.

**G1: And what do you make work about?**

**G2:** Well the through-line of my work is usually the object making process. I'm intrigued with why people, including myself, make objects and how the methods they use convey their personal history. This gets me thinking a lot about labour and craft and how these fields offer unique answers to why people produce both utilitarian objects and art objects.

**G1: And why is this at all important to you?**

**G2:** I see it as a way of distilling at least part of a person's subjective experience into tangible conversations. It's like listening to an interview. You learn about a person through their responses to external stimuli. Except, instead of a person asking questions, it's a material asking questions. And materials ask different questions than people.

**G1: What do you intend for the viewer to get from the work you make?**

**G2:** I don't feel I have enough control over who views my work, and in what context, to attempt to control anyone's reading of my work. I try to leave hypotheses about my work's reception removed from the decision making process as much as possible.

**G1: But, you still do think about the viewer to some extent?**

**G2:** Of course I do. I can't imagine making work in which I wouldn't do that. I guess what I mean is that I don't trust myself to correctly anticipate people's responses. The only response I can seem to correctly anticipate is my own. So that is the logic I rely on when I produce my art.

**G1: If the work doesn't anticipate anything in specific from the viewer though, why do you show it?**

**G2:** I like to see how my personal experience making artwork is received when presented outside of the context of my studio and the time spent creating. I see my personal experience like a tool. It shapes and alters the final object without ever actually showing itself explicitly.

**G1: Could you describe what process you go through to make your work?**

**G2:** I work very heavily in printmaking and glass cold working, but I see both as an expression of drawing. It's the root of everything I make. I have been writing a lot as well, but even that I see as related to drawing. Every letter is a tiny drawing and has its own signature to it, which I get a kick out of. Even as I move into non-handwritten writing, I try to treat words and phrases like objects with specific qualities, just like prints and drawings and glass.

Image credit: *Cup Poem*.  
Graeme Dearden. Ink on Paper.

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 PRINT POSTERS BROCHURES  
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# Greetings from Knoxville

## SOUTHERN GRAPHICS COUNCIL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

A project by Alex Linfield and Morgan Melenka



**HAVING NEVER BEEN TO KNOXVILLE** we initially struggled with how we could possibly make a site specific work. There were two things that we knew: the word and the image – Knoxville, and its associated illustrations and idealizations. Old type-as-image postcards came to mind, the ones from the mid 20th century. Big bold lettering in these images work as a window onto the promises the location holds for its visitors.

For the exhibition we agreed to reproduce these postcards as large scale woodcuts that would be mounted on boards for support. We would cut the letterforms out of the prints and supports to mimic the window-like letters of the original postcards. Instead of the letterforms revealing images of the city's monuments and architecture the visitors would receive a re-framing of their immediate reality. This would bring together three ways of representing Knoxville Tennessee into one piece of printed ephemera: the idealized illustrations meant to welcome tourists, the environment behind the print's window, and most importantly, the name of the environment, Knoxville Tennessee. Each of these depended upon one another in order to solidify its existence as a "place".

As we were being processed at U.S customs, I told the agent we were part of an exhibition called *Prints in Peculiar Places*. I stressed that these prints were not for sale but would act as signs on a hill. The customs agent eyed the concrete forming tube on his computer screen, resigned as if he didn't want to understand this doomed pursuit, and responded, "well that is *mighty peculiar*" and stamped the customs card.

We were headed to Knoxville where Southern Graphics Conference International 2015 was hosted by the University of Tennessee. We had been provided a photo beforehand of the site where our oversized woodcut postcards would be installed, an image that was only a few inches big of a place that was over 3000 km away. We were assured that the pixels in the distance were the local monument, the Sunsphere, a structure from the 1982 World's Fair and Knoxville's main landmark. This was our Knoxville Tennessee, the image to the words. Nearly every Google image search of Knoxville will contain the shining orb perched above the city. This icon functions effectively as the city's identity. Perhaps even more effectively than the place's given name.

After fabricating our supports and mounting the woodcuts, we approached the installation site. The site held a good view of the city's downtown area but was mediated by a chain link fence and a "violators will be prosecuted" sign. This content was unanticipated but completely welcome. Although the installation was meant to be experienced by those passing by, it was through documentation that we discovered something very interesting. Re-photographing the prints and cropping the environment at the postcard's borders recompiled them into a distillation of place again, however, unlike the original postcards, these photographs contrasted the real against the ideal.

At the end of the exhibition we reclaimed our prints from their supports and repackaged them for their travel back to Edmonton. The prints, now weathered by the week's rain, more accurately resemble the postcards after which they were modeled. ■

## TO GIVE VOICE: The Artist Statement and *Ekphrasis* by Stephanie Bailey

**REDUCTIVE, JARGON-FILLED, SELF-DEFEATING.** These are all things that come to mind when we think of the artist statement today. But what are we talking about when we talk about the artist statement? Whether it's for grant or grad school applications, as part of the didactics in an exhibition, or as a pedagogical tool to encourage artists to reflect on their practice, the artist statement can serve a number of different functions. Across the board, though, it's become obvious that the state of the artist statement is in complete disrepair, which begs the question: is there anything to be done to redeem this genre?

In Jennifer Liese's recent article in *Paper Monument*, "Toward a History and Future of the Artist Statement," she attempts to answer exactly this question. To begin, she points out the lack of research done on the history of the artist statement: "[s]trangely, given its proliferation, the actual history of the genre remains a mystery." After examining some insightful historical examples of artist's writing about their art, she calls for the need to think more critically and creatively about this now entrenched industry requirement: "For everyone's sake—artists and the people and institutions working to support them—it would be better to welcome sense and nonsense, coherence and paradox, philosophy, poetry, and maybe even a little more than a page, all of which might truly represent, rather than reduce, artists and their art."

In an effort to make a small contribution to the vast and unclear history of the artist statement that Liese makes a noble effort to assemble, I would like to add to the table the ancient art of *ekphrasis* and suggest that it might offer some insight into how we can rethink the artist statement. Put most simply, *ekphrasis* is a rhetorical exercise that can be defined as a "description of a work of art." The etymology of the word, however, gives us a better understanding of what it's really all about. Originally from the Greek *ek* ("out") and *phrasis* ("to speak"), *ekphrasis* seeks to give the work of art a voice with which to speak. Rather than being a mere description or explanation of the work of art, it offers the original work the opportunity to express itself through different means.

The aim of *ekphrasis* has never been to act as an "answer key" to the work of art, but rather to bridge the gap between the verbal and visual. In other words, it has always sought to turn *readers* into *viewers* through the qualities of *enargeia* (vividness), *sapheneia* (clarity) and *phantasia* (mental image). Inherent in this rhetorical device is a certain self-reflexivity as well. According to the classicist, James A. Francis, "the relationship between word and image in ancient *ekphrasis* is, from its beginning, complex and interdependent, presenting sophisticated reflection on the conception and process of both verbal and visual representations." In contemporary usage, however, *ekphrasis* is found across many disciplines and cannot be reduced to "verbal representation of visual representation." It is

now more generally understood as a rhetorical device where one medium of art responds to another medium by shedding light on both its content and form—whether it's through poetry, painting, photography and so on. Through rhetorical vividness, *ekphrasis* attempts to enhance or illuminate the original art and, in so doing, takes on a life of its own.

Although *ekphrasis* was not historically practiced by an artist responding to his or her own work, it still might be fruitful to consider artist statements in relation to this age-old tradition; that is, it may prove useful in laying bare some of the assumptions underlying our conception of the genre today. Insofar as *ekphrasis* is a form of art itself, it does not assume a distinction between "critic" and "artist"—rather, they are one and the same. Are there ways in which this distinction has limited the genre of the artist statement? Could we learn to see writing about art as a work of art in and of itself, and what would this look like? Do artist statements even need to take written form? Ultimately, the ancient art of "speaking + out" gives rise to one crucial question that may help to rethink and reinvigorate the artist statement: beyond a mere description, what does it look like to "give voice" to a work of art? ■

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Bruegel, Pieter. *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. ca. 1558. Oil on canvas mounted on wood. Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.

"In Breughel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away  
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may  
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,  
But for him it was not an important failure."

— From W. H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts."

# Hot Words, Hot Imagery and How to Use Them!

by Rob Harpin



© Ruscha, Ed. *ARTISTS WHO DO BOOKS*. 1976. Pastel on paper.  
Tate / National Galleries of Scotland.

The defining characteristics of hot words are intangible – but in general they refer to the meaning or unmeaning of words when they are removed from their context – be it a song, or book, television show...

## I USE TEXT IN ART BECAUSE I'M A CRAP WRITER.

I'm a crap writer because I'm less interested in the overall context of a sentence or paragraph than I am with what the artist Ed Ruscha calls 'hot words'. Words have temperatures, according to Ruscha; the hotter they are, the more interested he is in them. I am also interested in hot words. The defining characteristics of hot words are intangible — but in general they refer to the meaning or unmeaning of words when they are removed from their context — be it a song, or book, television show... etc.

I watch too much TV so most of my hot words come from there. The world of advertising is an incredible place to hunt, as it's an advertiser's responsibility to distill information into catchy, noticeable, and concentrated formats. Sometimes words in advertising become so concentrated that they lose all logical meaning and focus on raw emotion. Statements like 'now more than ever', 'game changing', and 'new and improved' have little to no meaning, but the urgency of these words is almost poetic.

These are hot words – words that exist within specific contexts, move into the “real world” and become part of current pop culture.

Unscripted television shows are a rich mine of hot words. In *America's Next Top Model*, Tyra Banks is famous for making up her own words that become distinctive parts of the ANTM lexicon (see Toooh and Booch). These words are too specific to be hot words outside of ANTM. In other cases, the real meaning and excitement of hot words lies within flippant, off the cuff words. One of my favourite examples is a moment where Jeremy Clarkson was called a 'TV Idiot' in an episode of *Top Gear*. What a beautiful way to describe him, and myself for watching that garbage. I love using 'TV Idiot'; it's a hot word that's specific to *Top Gear*, and has a universal meaning because most of us are TV Idiots.

In my practice, I merge hot words and hot imagery — it's a tricky process.

Hot words sit around the studio waiting to be rediscovered and used. My “hot imagery” goes through a similar discovery process. An image is found, there's a brief love affair, and often the image is discarded. I come back to it, what do I do with it? I file it, and finally rediscover and use it. Sometimes the image comes first, other times it's the text, but when they do come together it usually feels right.

It's difficult to explain why a particular image pairs with a particular word or piece of text. Sometimes the connections between the text and image are easy to make (this equals that, or this is the opposite of that), other times the connections are vague. What is important is that the image and text exist in a kind of equilibrium. One tends not to get too shouty over the other. The push and pull between image and text is interesting while the delicate balance situates everything. Pattern and colour can also contain hot words. Tessellation can ease the mind when a few chaotic words are visually uttered.

There is immediacy to text-based visual art. However, deeper meaning can be something of a slow burn. When connections between image and text are not obvious, the mind wants to understand, and it creates its own meaning. This leads to a kind of playful discovery that is simply fuss free... more hot words. ■









Jim Johansson is an Edmonton-based film photographer who spends as much time as possible dragging his Hasselblad cameras down North America's dusty backroads. [www.jimshootsfilm.com](http://www.jimshootsfilm.com)

# An object cannot write...

but if it could, I think it would write from the body. If what I think of objects is true, then their texts would focus on material experience – on physical properties, bodily sensations, and the effect of environmental conditions. Their voice would describe the ways in which matter is meaningful, making it matter to us through the construct of language. What they would actually write, we obviously don't know, but it's useful to imagine the hypothetical voice of objects in considering some writing by contemporary artists, and the category called Art Writing.

There are no rules, but Art Writing tends to focus on physical experience, voice, and character. This approach ties into the feminist discourse around embodiment, subjectivity, performativity, and materialism. I interpret the construction of a subjective voice for matter, in the context of artistic production, as a performative gesture that is critical of our consumer culture, which is simultaneously materialistic in the capitalist sense and careless about the material world. It is also an act of criticism of an art economy that serves this culture.

An object might not need to write. It has meaning of its own, but if we can find a way to write through them symbolically, then a voice that is situated in an object would have great critical potential; it is a voice that is never heard. To create a subjectivity for material, even in the realm of fiction, is a way of representing a form of agency for material bodies which is not felt in the everyday.

For the last couple of years, I've been writing in different forms as an integral part of producing artworks for exhibitions. I want to see if it is possible, by trying different models of interdependence between writing and sculpture, to find my own working definition of Art Writing. For me, this definition lies in the construction of a symbiotic relationship between text and object, a form of embodiment specific to art production. We can write about something that already exists – we can criticise an artwork – but this is imposing interpretation. That critical voice is situated in the body of the author and the object cannot answer. Visual artists have the privileged position to practice writing through the making of an object, from the moment of its conception to its construction and exhibition. I'd like to know if this results in the creation of a unique type of object with a special power.

Like parents, (please excuse the lazy analogy) we artists bring to life something that did not choose to exist, and this helpless thing is at the mercy of the

world that surrounds it. The purpose of the entire infrastructure surrounding art production is the social parenting of objects through institution, interpretation, preservation, education, and monetization. I want to care for the thing beyond production. I want to try to give it a form of agency, even if this is largely symbolic, in the form of an artwork. I suppose I am arguing for another style of parenting that advocates self-determination, agency, and the voice of a subject.

Producing an object with a voice relies on fiction, and that voice is highly performative; it exists in relation to a body. There is always a performer in Art Writing. This performer can be the object that embodies the text, the writer performing through the text, or the reader physically relating to the text.

This type of writing effects criticism. Acting as a form of mild self-defence, it can absorb the didactic text and make it part of the artwork. It can create a shield of subjectivity. Perhaps the desire to unify the voice that 'explains' the work and place it within the embodied object originally sparked this writing style. It remains clear that the artist has produced both parts, because of course, the object cannot write. However, if the writing is integral to the artwork and if they are made concurrently, then they are equal in such a way that the work theoretically speaks from within rather than awaiting to be talked at, interpreted, and defined by voices outside of itself.

Please don't misunderstand me. I don't mean that objects are individuals, or sentient, or animistic, but I think that as artists, we have the responsibility to make objects that represent an idealised relationship to the physical world. Art Writing is the way that I sometimes address concerns about the materiality of our own bodies, our use and consumption of objects, and our cultural conception of materiality. It is not the only way to go about this aim, but it is an idealistic gesture towards creating alternative models of existence, if not for society as a whole, then at least at the scale of our own material artistic production.

It's clear that we are entirely dependent on material. It exerts a huge amount of power over us and never says a thing, but sometimes we forget. I want to acknowledge this power in my work, even though it's hard to say it right.

— Josée Aubin Ouellette

April 20, 2015



# Between the Lines

by Zach Polis

Welcome to the Human Shop! I see Pytrot has kindly escorted you here. How may we help you?"

Her blue bob gave a slight bounce. Her smile was bright. Social. But the gaze she shot at me was strong. It was as if she were trying to overpower me—the weaker animal—without letting on.

"There's somebody I want to take over the steering wheel for, so to speak," I said.

"Is that so? For good purposes, I hope. No. That's impossible. The dark ones always come to us, don't they Pytrot? I'm surprised Keigo told you about us. He's not the chatty type. Well. Shall we? Pytrot."

The red imp walked to the back of the room and picked up a metal cylinder off the counter, and doubled back to us. I had never seen a gait like his. It was like giving a horse clown shoes to wear.

"Pull back your sleeve please. Either arm will do," the woman said.

"What for?" I said.

"We're going to implant our own chip into you. Don't worry. Yes – if you make a mistake that damages us, we'll make sure you live a miserable life. But, if you act professionally, consider this chip as nothing. It has no effect on your life. This is collateral. Simple risk mitigation."

She gave a quick, clean smile. I failed to detect any warmth. What could I do? Back out now? Impossible. To hell with the chip!

I rolled up my left sleeve and felt a cold, metallic bite on my skin. The needle struck quick and released slowly, the way a scorpion pierces its stinger into the body of its prey. I wondered which would feel more pleasant, this or the scorpion?

*The scorpion.*

The red mark already began to swell and itch like hell, if hell were constructed solely with a fully body sunburn and a backscratcher.

I better not piss anyone off now. Especially if I thought this hurt. I was about to do something illegal and there wouldn't be any law authorities to cry mama to if I didn't like my new friends.

"Slip this over your face."

The blue haired woman gave me a visor with a display screen on it.

"It synchs up with the chip we gave you."

"Virtual reality headset?" I ask.

"Oh. It's more than virtual. Imagine your body being sent through a teleporter. You come out completely on the other side, yet—simultaneously—you've never left your first location."

"Right."

"It's okay. You don't have to understand. It's more of an intuitive thing once you get going. You'll be here with us the whole time while you inhabit the body of your target. You'll get used to managing two realities at once."

Pytrot walks to a terminal and starts moving through mountains of data on the screen.

"How will you find my target?" I asked the blue bobbed woman.

"Keigo gave us the name. We're locating him right now. Our technology has impressive range. We can hack any chip within a 500km radius, entrain with it, and pilot the user. Fascinating, isn't it?"

The headset began to light up and a flurry of geometry and code flashed in front of my eyes. I couldn't make sense of anything I saw.

"You see things happening in front of your eyes? Good. That means Pytrot has found the target. You're going to experience some profound changes in your mind and body soon. I can't tell you what. It's unique to everyone. You'll start synching up with your target. Feeling and thinking things the way he does. You'll still be your own person but heavily under the influence of another."

"How will I pilot him?"

"It's like riding a bicycle, really."

My eyelids got heavy. I felt I was being dragged down a deep well. My flesh was stripping off in thick, heavy clumps. I lost all sense of up and down, any direction. Gravity went bye-bye in a flash. My body was hurled from the heights of a blue mountain, smashing through tiny red clouds in the sky.

"You might get some resistance at first. But that's how it always goes."

Where was that voice coming from?

Behind the red clouds there were more red clouds, born again and again. Puff after puff, I fell through them all. And then I hit the surface of black storming waves, and before I knew it I was in the centre of that ocean like a piece of gum in a lollipop.

"Ease into it. If you can move past those emotions, you can find your way into some profitable nervous centers."

What were these waves singing? Never mind. They are the authority on the matter. Better to just do what I was told then dissect the ocean.

Pop! Next thing I knew there wasn't anything to see or feel. I was devoid of all senses, all stimuli, except for these thoughts.

"Accessing the target's retina."

Pytrot? What a splendid voice you have!

And then the woman said, "In a moment you will be able to see through the target's eyes. It's like a one-

way mirror. You can see into his world, but he can't see into yours. Very handy, isn't it?"

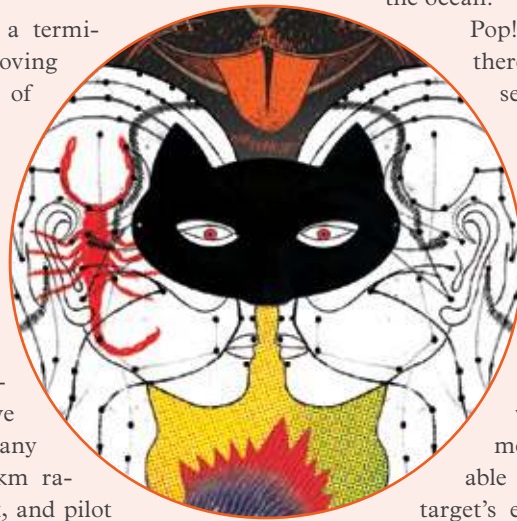
Ah!

So this was Murata Takahashi's world.

I ran between the lines of his being. I was a cryptic aura, a freakish shadow, a clump left to float and sink through his body at will. My mind was projected into his nervous centre, and ghost synapses meshed together even though we were miles apart. I was beyond the limits of my body, overfiring. I was an intruding secret.

I entered the flash, the white void.

*I'm coming for you, Murata Takahashi. ■*



PART TWO OF A SERIALIZED NOVELLA INSPIRED BY EXHIBITIONS AT SNAP GALLERY.

Zach Polis writes. One dry martini later, truth strips the rest of this biography cool and clean. Cheers, Mr. Hemingway!



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF SIGN PAINTING

— and the resurgence of craft

by Jennifer Konanz



**"SO YOU WANT TO PAINT LETTERS, DO YOU?"** were the opening lines in the little zine-like manuals handed out at the beginning of New Bohemia Signs' Introduction to Brush Lettering Workshop. As I took a look around the little California sign shop, with its walls plastered with hand-painted eye-candy, sitting in front of the paint stained easel boards setup with enticingly fresh paper—yes, I thought to myself. Yes I do!



I had been dabbling in sign painting for awhile prior to this workshop, working for an old-timer in Calgary who generously took me on as his part-time apprentice, so I had heard a lot about what a traditional sign painter had to say about his trade – and it used to be thought of as just that—a trade—no different from a mechanic or a carpenter and with about just as much glamour. Sign painting was a lucrative, practical trade and extremely common. You'd be surprised by the number of people who can say they've been a sign painter at some point in their lives. My previous landlord was a sign painter. He was also a man, which was the norm for the field in those days. Why would women be interested in getting paint under their nails? And the logistics of getting up a ladder in a dress would mean she had to wear pants, and so you see the problems unravel... And nevermind higher education. Any man could pick up a brush and a mahl stick and with practice and proper techniques, apprenticing alongside experienced painters, make a good living at being a sign painter.

This sign painting shop in San Francisco shop was not the norm—not today, not 30, not 50 years ago. It wasn't pumping out orders of eighty identical real-estate signs that would be thrown away within a week or two. And they weren't hell-bent on the "rules" of lettering. We were encouraged to have fun. It wasn't grudgingly practical, it was artistic. It felt like a painting or printmaking studio from art school where people talked about the local indie music scene and organic gardening over their shoulders with each other as they painted. Yet to see a sign painting shop flourishing on a scale larger than a one-person operation (as most today are) is rare. To be able to paint letters well enough and fast enough to be able to convince a business to pay for their signage to be done that way at a time when printers and vinyl can produce a cleaner, faster job every time is a tough sell. But it's being done. How? Because it now serves a niche market. There are a few

people who are willing to pay more for a process that is long, inefficient, inconsistent and riddled with problems related newer, unreliable materials—because it's not printed, it's not plastic, it's handmade. The beauty happens when a competent painter has the skills to execute a clean, sharp, smooth sign despite these factors. I don't want people looking at what I've just done and think, "Oh! That looks handmade." Or "I could do that." Handmade or hand-painted shouldn't translate into an excuse for poor quality or shoddy painting. I'm always working to bring a higher level of skill and craftsmanship to the work that makes people feel proud to own it and to show it off. If they feel they could have just done it themselves, I don't think they're going to value that object nearly as much. I think our generation is tired of cheap, crappy products distributed from big box retailers. Hand-painting signs and objects is a way to restore some of that value and personal touch back into things.

Sign painting isn't the trade it used to be. You can't just learn some brush skills and be able to feed yourself off it anymore, traveling from town to town sleeping in your car and painting signs all across the country. It's become something that (what I think) is much better. It has morphed into a strange and glorious intersection between art, design, and craft. In glasswork, it's also equal parts painting and printmaking—which is something that for the longest time I had no idea about. It's equal parts function, luxury item, piece of art and commercial practicality. The rising interest in craft and handmade, locally produced items is only adding to its rise in popularity. Sign painting now belongs to a new generation of artists, graphic designers and letterers who maintain respect for tradition, but are adapting it to its new environment and breaking rules along the way. All forms of hand lettering—both drawn and painted—are becoming increasingly popular in graphic design applications including logos, packaging, advertising and editorial work in addition to signage. It has come full circle—offering us the organic-ness and adaptability that took a back seat for years as the printing press and then the computer wowed us and then dulled us with its linear grids. Just as analog photography teetered near the brink of death when digital became all the rage, so too has hand lettering and sign painting come back to life. You'd think that this cycle has happened enough times that we'd not go ahead and throw out the "old" technology as soon as something new arrives, but we are a strange and silly species... I'm just happy to be here at this moment and have the pleasure of riding this wave out as long as I can.

Viva La Sign Painting! ■



# My Process

with Cate Kuzik | [www.ochrelea.com](http://www.ochrelea.com)



**How long have you been printing with the Letterpress? What initially attracted you to the medium?** I learned relief printing nearly 5 years ago and started working on the Letterpress shortly after. I was instantly taken by how it allowed me to take my carvings to another level. Learning how to set up and use the letterpress meant I could print more in less time with better quality control. I was hooked.

**Focus and patience are virtues of a Letterpress artist, what else do you feel are essential qualities needed to work the press and create prints?** You need to love rulers and basic math. Everything and I mean everything in letterpress is carefully measured, from fonts to the wooden furniture and metal spacers used to "lock" everything in place; it all must be secure before printing.

**What are some of the challenges of working the letterpress?** Oftentimes it's just a matter of being in the right headspace. Printing angry almost never ends well, and it can be hard to stop and walk away since the set up and clean up can be lengthy. Same goes for carving, one slip of the tool and you have to start over. I've learned to have more than one project on the go so I can change it up when I need to step away.

**What tips do you have to those new to the medium?** Learn the limitations of the press you are working with. There are different letterpresses for different purposes, currently, I only have access to larger cylinder proofing presses, which lends great to creating posters, but also means its more challenging to print smaller projects.

Beginners are often intimidated as many letterpresses are motorized, but there is honestly nothing to fear. By Learning the limitations it also means you can play more confidently with the medium. My mantra is to learn how to not break shit so I can move forward. This is how I have approached all printmaking techniques I have learned and so far it's working.

**A lot of your work references pop culture, what led you to that and where do you want it to lead you?** My pop culture work was actually an idea that grew from going to various entertainment and comic expos. This world was new to me and I was taken by how so many people line up to get signatures from various creators and entertainers. At first I really had no desire to participate, until I discovered actor Cary Elwes was going to be at Emerald City Comic Con in Seattle, and oh how I wanted to meet Westly from the *Princess Bride*. So, the question was what to get signed? If I'm going to go to the effort to get his signature, it can't be on just anything. I had just bought my first set of wood type and thought what better way to first use it than printing a *Princess Bride* quote. Sadly Cary cancelled at the last moment and I have yet to get his signature but the idea of making minimal pop art continued.

Since then I have created more minimal pop culture art and have been venturing into referencing some of my favorite songs and books, and welcome the opportunity to work on event and gig posters in the future.

**Are you able to make a career as a letterpress artist – what are some of the challenges you face?** In term of making a career of it, I shall soon find out; I am just starting to sell at markets and in early talks with local retailers. Just as any new business the feeling like you have to be able to do it all can seem daunting. Creating a website, business cards, marketing, social media, and let's not forget accounting is a lot of work and I still need to create product. For now, I am slowly working at it while constantly reminding myself that it's ok if my boxes are not all checked off.

One of the other main challenges is education, there is more awareness with the current letterpress revival, but many are unsure what it means. Now, I always take my carvings and type with me to markets to explain how each limited editioned print is made.

**What are your strategies for determining fonts and composition for your work? What challenges does working with the letterpress present?**

Since I am still working old school with metal and wood type my main determination is simply what I have access to, the type of font sets the tone of the work. There are limitations to what can be done, by how full the type drawer is and can often determine the direction of the work.

I have also been building a collection of vintage image blocks, old stock images from the 1950's to 1980's. The weird and random images I have accumulated for creating my stationary line pairs well with my cheeky sense of humour, which I'll be selling at upcoming art and craft sales.

The biggest challenge with creating a letterpress collection in Canada is shipping. No surprise, it isn't cheap to ship lead.

**What is your favorite font?** Depending what the focus of the print I'm working on, I typically carve an image to set with type, in which case I gravitate towards simple, straight, crisp fonts like Helvetica, and Headline. If the focus of the print is the type I tend to hand-letter the words and generally use a curvy font for emphasis and forgiveness – not sure what that says about me, I guess I only like my own curves. ■




**SNAP**
**CALL FOR  
PROPOSALS**

# Interested in writing for SNAPLine?



## About SNAPLine

SNAP welcomes submissions from local writers and artists to contribute to *SNAPLine*, the organization's quarterly publication. *SNAPLine* is a collective publication created by a committee of members from the Society of Northern Alberta Print-Artists (SNAP) and Edmonton's arts community. The publication is a unique perspective on not only printmaking in Edmonton and around the world, but it also explores other dimensions of contemporary visual art. Each issue includes not only organizational news and the work of print-artists, but also feature articles that are engaging, critical and creative.

## Submission Guidelines

Prior to writing, please provide a statement of interest, outlining the proposed article (~200 words), and two samples of previous writing to Alexandra Bowes, Communications Coordinator: [communications@snapartists.com](mailto:communications@snapartists.com)

**For more information contact: Alexandra Bowes**  
at [communications@snapartists.com](mailto:communications@snapartists.com)

*Note: All submissions will be juried by SNAP's Publications Committee.*

## Upcoming Issues

SNAP is seeking articles, photo essays, creative writing, and critical reviews for these upcoming *SNAPLine* issues:

### 1) Art and Activism

This issue explores the nexus of art and activism, including topics such as: environmentalism and art; graffiti and the commercialization of art; recent controversies regarding activism in the art world; critical reflections on the role of art; performance art and activism; etc.

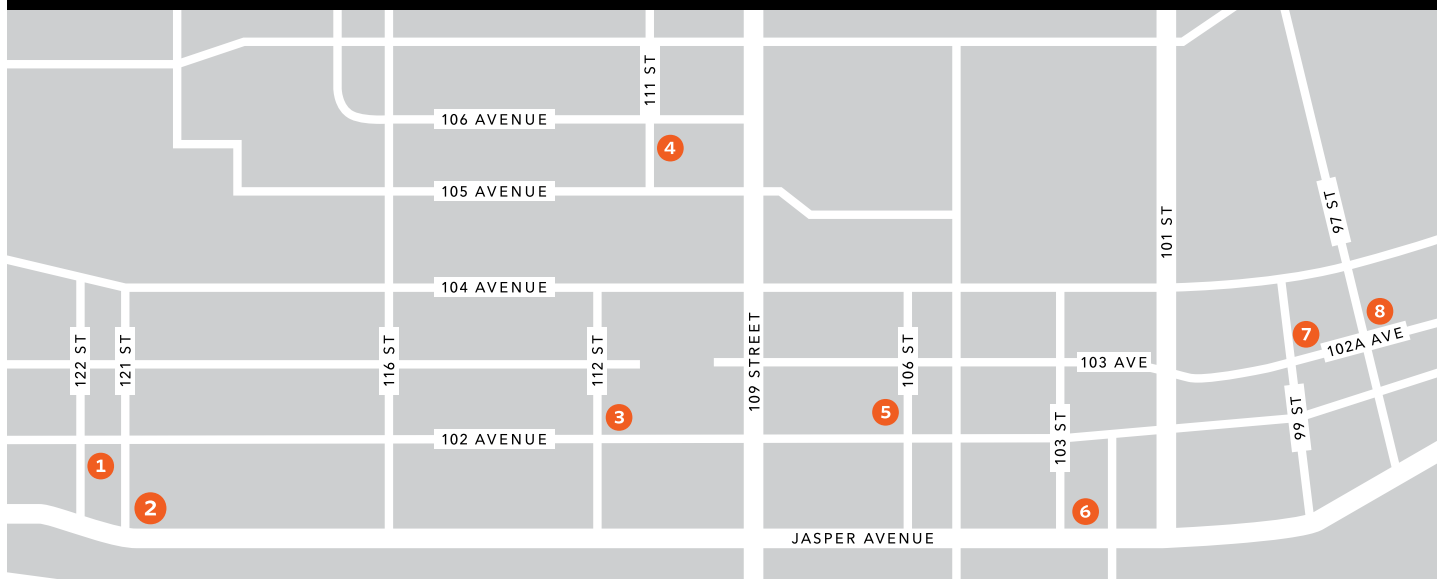
Statement of Interest Deadline: **June 15th**

### 2) Collecting, Collectors & Collections

This issue examines the art of collecting, including topics such as: private vs. public collections; how-to start your own art collection; funding for collections; determining parameters of a collection; unique and bizarre collections; profiles of famous collectors; examining the impulse to collect; etc.

Statement of Interest Deadline: **September 15th**

## Artist-run Centres and Public Galleries in Oliver and Downtown Edmonton



**1 Creative Practices Institute**  
10149 122 street  
[www.creativepracticesinstitute.com](http://www.creativepracticesinstitute.com)

**2 SNAP Gallery** / 10123 121 street  
[www.snapartists.com](http://www.snapartists.com)

**3 Harcourt House** / 10215 112 street  
[www.harcourthouse.ab.ca](http://www.harcourthouse.ab.ca)

**4 dc3 Art Projects** / 10567 111 street  
[www.dc3artprojects.com](http://www.dc3artprojects.com)

**5 Latitude 53** / 10242 106 street  
[www.latitude53.org](http://www.latitude53.org)

**6 UofA Museums at Enterprise**  
10230 Jasper avenue  
[museums.ualberta.ca](http://museums.ualberta.ca)

**7 Art Gallery of Alberta**  
2 Sir Winston Churchill Square  
[www.youraga.ca](http://www.youraga.ca)

**8 The Drawing Room**  
10253 97 street  
[www.drawingroomedmonton.com](http://www.drawingroomedmonton.com)



# A Revision of Forward

— book of poems by Wendy McGrath & an exhibition of prints by Walter Jule

**TWELVE YEARS AGO**, printmaker Walter Jule asked Edmonton writer Wendy McGrath to collaborate on a print and poetry project and presented her with a series of ghostly proofs on thin Japanese gampi paper. These ephemeral images inspired her to write a series of ekphrastic fragments. These pieces were the first iteration of the long poem “A Revision of Forward” and they evoked the circularity of time and the infinite aspects of love.

Jule’s first prints were larger works and contrasted with these initial shorter poetic responses. As Jule and McGrath continued their collaboration, the relationship between their work underwent a revision in approach. While the poem “A Revision of Forward” expanded on the page, Jule’s prints contracted and intensified. However, what remained consistent in the printmaker’s and poet’s work was the use of the page as metaphor for the forces that push together and pull apart the print and poem in conception and execution. This excerpt from the poem “A Revision of Forward” speaks to this relationship:

scales might balance connection  
but mock any transparency  
of elements moving toward metaphor

metaphor moves toward elements  
of mock transparency  
connection might balance the scales

A small exhibition of the prints and poems was first shown at the Stanley Milner Library and were included in a solo exhibition of Jule’s prints at Harcourt House Gallery, 2002. Later, three-dimensional prints were shown with poems at the University of Alberta Print Study Centre.

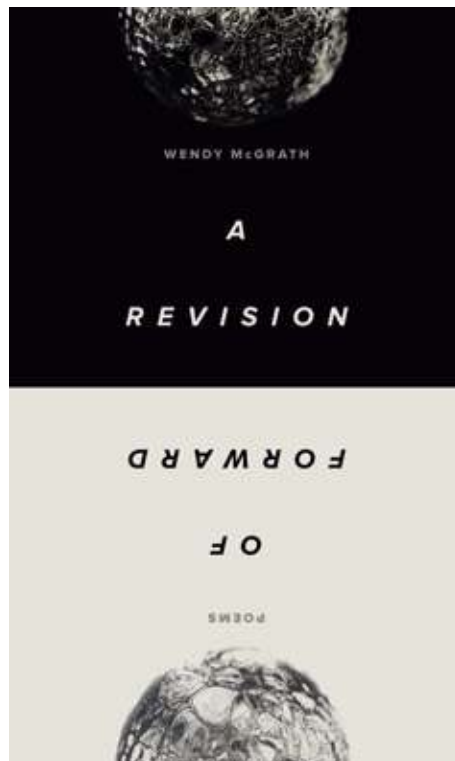
As the project progressed, printmaker and poet continued to search for meaning on the page and for meaning and inspiration in each other’s work. McGrath and Jule explored various ways in which this interplay between genres might evolve and decided a book and companion exhibition of prints would be the best way to communicate the scope of the project and its development.

## A Revision of Forward

exhibition runs

September 24 to November 7  
at SNAP Gallery

check [www.snapartists.com](http://www.snapartists.com) for upcoming details on the reception and book launch



Walter Jule’s visual images are  
aids to meditation, communicating  
on an intuitive level that which  
cannot be expressed in words.

In them we experience in  
suspended time the knife’s edge  
between creation and destruction.

— Jennifer Dickson, C.M.

Those first ekphrastic fragments expanded to become revisions of visual and metaphorical meaning:

a sheet of paper  
becomes the meaning of stone  
an answer to light and dark  
a question of water or salt  
a single tear  
my heel marks  
the edge of my soul  
impressions set in cement  
this is my lie  
so let me tell it  
let me tell it so

my lie  
an impression in cement  
the edge of my soul  
a heel mark  
a single tear  
salt and the question: whether water  
answers to light or darkness  
finds the meaning of stone  
on a sheet of paper

McGrath’s poetry encouraged Jule to incorporate three-dimensional elements in his works, which have been shown in numerous international shows as well as several retrospective exhibitions in Canada, the USA and Europe. References in McGrath’s poetry to physical objects, colours, temperature helped Jule to expand his visual vocabulary to embrace print-installation.

This collaboration culminates with the exhibition of Jule’s prints—which integrate text and image in three-dimensional works. *A Revision of Forward* runs September 24 to November 7, 2015 and features the launch of McGrath’s poetry collection *A Revision of Forward* (NeWest Press).

Walter Jule recently received the 2015 Southern Graphic Council International Excellence in Teaching Award for his contribution to printmaking through his work as an educator and his innovative studio practice. McGrath’s most recent novel *North East* (NeWest Press, 2014) has been nominated for a Writers Guild of Alberta George Bugnet award. *A Revision of Forward* (NeWest Press, 2015) is McGrath’s second collection of poetry and her fifth book. ■

## Sponsor Membership

4 Limited Edition Prints. \$150. Supporting the production of art & writing in Edmonton.

### SIGN ME UP!

We want to let you in on the best art deal in town. SNAP has been commissioning the creation of new works by print artists for over 25 years. Becoming a SNAP Member at the Sponsor Level currently costs **\$150** annually & our Sponsor Members receive **4 limited edition fine art prints** in the mail and a printed version of our beautifully designed quarterly newsletter, SNAPline.

The Newsletter Print program is one of the most exciting things we do as it connects our Sponsor Members with exceptionally talented artists and with the physical manifestation of contemporary print production in Edmonton and beyond. This program allows us to pay artists and writers to produce new works and provides our organization with funds to continue to strengthen our programs, and to develop new and innovative projects to serve our members and the Edmonton arts community. We are developing our publication content to include critical and creative writing by commissioned local writers

By supporting SNAP through Sponsor Membership you are ensuring that we can carry out our long-standing commitment to promote and preserve the fine art of printmaking through courses, lectures, workshops and exhibitions. I invite you to become part of this unique program, you can enroll in person at our gallery or online through our website [www.snapartists.com](http://www.snapartists.com).

## Membership Levels

### Sponsor: \$150

\*receives 4 newsletter prints a year

### Individual: \$40

### Student/Senior: \$20

## Membership Benefits

20% off at Colours Artist Supplies

15% off at the Big Pixel Inc

10% off at the Paint Spot

10% off at Delta Art & Drafting

\* Check [snapartists.com](http://snapartists.com) for monthly member perks at various Edmonton retailers

## Funders



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SNAP - Society of Northern  
Alberta Print-Artists

**Interested in writing for SNAPline?**  
Contact us at [snap@snapartists.com](mailto:snap@snapartists.com)

SNAP loves all the volunteers, members, supporters and funders that make our organization not just possible but also a thriving art community. A special thanks to our funders & supporters.

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