

## *Jumelage*

Artistic collaboration unsettles and activates. It includes risk, limitations, chance, and synchronicity. Art historian Charles Green notes that collaboration is fundamentally “a deliberately chosen alteration of artistic identity from individual to composite subjectivity”<sup>i</sup> – the expansion of a single entity within the boundaries of a relationship.

*Jumelage* is an apt title for this residency, exchange and exhibition. Most literally, the term *jumelage* means to pair something with a matching counterpart; it is also used to describe the “twinning” or sistering of foreign cities. This diplomatic practice exploded after World War II, as a means to forge symbolic relationships between cultures. Theorist Grant Kester has proposed that the proliferation of collaborative or collective approaches in contemporary art is linked to a globalizing culture, one marked by uncertainty.<sup>ii</sup> Bonds are strengthening, strategic. Used to name an exchange between Toronto and Québec, two cities within one nation, *Jumelage* implies cultural, historical, and linguistic separation exceeding geography. It also indicates a lasting, critical connection and shared resources, ideas, and energies – the building of community.

Drawing on the complexity of this word, the projects took up twinning, or mirroring, as a thematic foundation. Deeply rooted in concepts of self and identity, these loaded symbols provide no shortage of reference in visual culture and theory. Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s mirror-phase readily springs to mind; a child’s first recognition of self, glimpsed as a unified whole, yet threatened by fragmentation. As noted by Green, mirrors, shadows, and twins are particularly prevalent in works of artistic collaborations, “as a language for affirming the collaborative bond, the creation of a third entity which is more than the sum of its parts.”<sup>iii</sup> As a starting point for discussion, this theme has led the *Jumelage* artists to produce new works that range over the personal, historical, natural and linguistic. Some have drawn on the binary structure of the residency itself. Many works have been realized through formats that demand combination (sewing together, book making; such physical joints are manifestations of an off-the-page and between-the-lines process of openness and integration.

Directly addressing the linguistic duality of the exchange, Pamela Dodds and Diane Fournier created the abecedarium *Chronique Analytique/Analytic Chronicle* (2010-2012). Instead of basic and familiar words, as alphabetical education might suggest, the artists chose complex and abstract ones: Amnesia/Amnésie, Logic/Logique, Utopia/Utopie. Fournier’s pictographs appear as free form word-association sketches: gestural, with loose, playful lines, variably alluding to their subjects. In contrast, Dodds’s are graphic and illustrative, often incorporating eyes, faces, and hands signing out the concepts. At times, the artists’ drawings sync fluidly, at others they float quizzically next to one another. Each page presents an instance of collaboration, each drawing’s meaning inflected by its pair. As a set, they portray degrees of connection, comprehension, and divergence. The cloud-shaped box the artists designed to house their pages, shaped like a cloud, is an appropriate vessel; likewise, language morphs, billows, is hard to grasp.

As Dodds and Fournier explore symbolic distance through language, Liz Menard and Jessie-Mélissa Bossé found the subject and structure of their collaborative project in the physical space between Québec and Toronto. *Between Two/Entre Deux* (2010-2012) features landscapes the artists experienced from the train, in transit between the cities. In this accordion style bookwork, two visions connect back-to-back along a single line – Bossé’s flurried, dark and undulating; Menard’s with clear light, coiled lines, and soft textures. Unfolded, zigzagging across a tabletop display, the prints are to be experienced in transit; walked along. The scenes embody the time-suspended drift of travel, punctuated by moments of clear impression. They easily collapse back into the book’s closed cover, like so many journeys recalled only as disconnected gaps. Simultaneously depicting two perspectives, the book reveals perceptual and expressive divergence, covering the distance between two people as well as two places.

Affects of distance also play a significant role in the work of Sally Ayre and Madeleine Sampson. Ayre’s series, *Drifting Letters* (2011) meditate on physical and temporal remoteness, using shells, feathers, and seaweed from the beaches of her native Newfoundland with fragments of her father’s wartime letters. Shadow, inked script

and textured layers submerge home and away in blue, deep, watery surfaces. Samson's artist book *desiderata / regretter l'absence* (2010-2011) likewise evokes her father, expressing separation and devotion through passages by Rainer Maria Rilke, and texts from a 19<sup>th</sup> century botany book. The connected photographic series *intervalle* (2012) shows soft shadows of plants cast against drawn curtains. Progressively darkened as if the sun were setting, they capture fading instants: windowsill *memento mori*. The pairing of Samson and Ayre sets a focus on longing, on a desire for a sense of self to be found and reflected in lineage. Here the shadows function just as Green describes; as an immaterial, yet integral bond, a presence signified by absence.

While Ayre and Sampson give plants a symbolic role in familial narratives, Liz Parkinson and Denise Blackburn address them in a more everyday, but still personal, way. Blackburn sought out plants linked to a particular physical environment—the shores of the St-Laurent River. *Carnets Naturalistes* (2010-2011) signifies the landscape itself; direct impressions of the plants, hung horizontally, echo the undulating surface of the river, while the multiple layers of transparent paper gently flutter, recalling the continual rushing of water. *Herboriser* (2011), a delicate box with a collection of prints slotted in, gives the project a sentimental quality - impressions as souvenirs, indexical, yet metonymic, connections to place and time. Parkinson's work recalls another environment all altogether, a domestic habitat. A series of textile-inspired prints, collectively titled *Heirloom* (2011-2012), Blankets, sheets, and covers, printed with delicate plants (once garden varieties, now considered weeds) appear at once comforting and tiring. The invasive species allude to the everyday and in-between (alluding to household chores), while the title calls up an item whose utility has been replaced with sentimentality, a treasure that is also a weight. Through productive contrast, these projects contemplate how surrounding flora (and its environmental and societal value) becomes a metaphor for how we fit into the world: where we are from and how we are noticed and classified.

Doug Guildford and Lisette Thibeault also took up nature as a subject, but the personal is secondary to the sheer energy of mirroring as a biological metaphor: the symmetry of the organic structures, the splitting of cells. The format of *Hanky/En Pièces Attachées* (2012) is akin to the scrambling of chromosomes; each sewn grid of 121 prints is a hybrid, half from each artist. Twin compositions result, which are none-the-less completely unique. From afar, they appear decorative, with the individual prints reading like patterned ceramic tiles. Closer looking reveals an unnerving plethora of specimens, vibrating and in an almost psychedelic fashion. The combined styles are distinctive; Guilford's etchings are playful, bustling with an amoebic, aquatic energy, at times appearing celestial. Thibeault's are darker, more graphic: recalling Rorschach inkblots, her jagged lines invoke the etymological—claws, or feelers. Utilizing parallels in their individual practices, together these artists composed a pulsing field of contrasts, a model of bio-diversity.

The forces of symmetry carry through *Interlocution suite* (2012), a collaborative work by Penelope Stewart and Lise Vézina which used pieces of vintage lace as a starting point for a multitude of correlations between organic and architectural forms. The etched, intricate threads become networks of coalescing scales; Stewart chose the lace collar in one panel for its reminiscence of Gaudi's parabolic arches. In another, Vézina chose a photograph of a glass atrium; with no reference for scale, the lines oscillate between strength and delicacy, steel and thread. What looks to be a close up of decorative molding could be read as a macro image of a butterfly's brow. The artists' separate projects with hinged oval plates push into more historic and personal territory. Stewart's *compacts* (2011) incorporate references to Victorian femininity, maps, branches, a plan for Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water with the words "utopia" and "paradise" crossed-out: all exploring how we visualize ourselves in the world, often through ideals of nature. Vézina's *secrets* (2011) set up a direct, reflective encounter, with each pair of eyes protectively inset in a small box. Returning these gazes, viewers are subtly super-imposed, a personal engagement that draws them into the narratives of these women. In their work together and apart, Stewart and Vézina engage a collective unconscious, integrating the timeless and archetypal with the fleeting and extremely personal—a glance, a note. They explore *pairing* as an underlying, cognitive process that orders how we see, and interpret the world; the self reflected in the other, mimicry, simile, and metaphor.

Across the six artist-pairs of *Jumelage*, there is at times a clear division of labor, two pieces fitting together or

standing side-by-side. In other instances, the connection is less clear, the final components less traceable to a single intention. Looking closely at these works, one can imagine how each artist was stretched, expanded, and limited by the exchange. Collaboration challenges the “frame,” as Green writes, blurring the “discursive boundary between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of a work of art.”<sup>iv</sup> While the final products of *Jumelage* are hung on the wall, laid out in vitrines, or otherwise distinct entities, the crux of the projects, the exchange, and the exhibition, is the intangible process of negotiation, the merger of ideas through media.

Rose Bouthillier

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<sup>i</sup> Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001): x.

<sup>ii</sup> Kester, Grant H., *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>iii</sup> Green, 185.

<sup>iv</sup> Green, x.