



## Claire Greenshaw

### *Are You Getting Smart With Me?*

The Helen Pitt Gallery Artist Run Centre is delighted to present *Are you getting smart with me?* an exhibition of new work by Canadian artist Claire Greenshaw. This series of drawings and sculptures are subtle inquiries into materiality and representation, a focus in Greenshaw's post-conceptual, studio-based practice.

The bulk of the work in this show consists of a series of carefully rendered drawings that represent discarded notes, lists, musings, declarations and defacements on different grounds. The sources for each of Greenshaw's drawings vary; some of these have been found, others given to the artist by friends. In a couple of instances, the note that is the subject of the drawing was actually intended for Claire. That Greenshaw knows a few of the "authors" of these texts is crucially important to the development of this series. They are not simply clues or spurs to assist the artist in speculating about the mysterious other who may have written them. Instead, the

drawings are revealing of the artist's affectionate preoccupation with the formal qualities of such writing and the way these messages function when displaced from their original context.

The speech-act of the informal utterance is perhaps nowhere more accurately materialized than in the casually written note. Written from one person to another, the note is often given in a situation where speaking is not possible. For example, we write each other notes in a lecture or meeting where one person is meant to be the focus of our attention as they authoritatively produce language. The secretly passed note – whether humorously or romantically defiant – is a way of naughtily or respectfully reminding each other that we can communicate without interfering with or interrupting the conventional speaker and audience relationship.

We also use notes in order to leave behind or send a visible trace of what we might have said had we had the chance to speak with one another in person. I suggest that informal notes are most like the spoken utterance in that the context (So thoroughly emphasized in Mikhail Bakhtin's early and somewhat broad conception of "dialogue") finds expression in the style of handwriting, the note's physical placement and the nature of what is written as interpreted against the history of shared utterances which precede it in the relationship between writer and receiver. Uprooted from their context, the messages contained in Greenshaw's selection of notes take on potentially hostile overtones, indecipherable strangeness or the effect of humorous non-sequiturs.

The other kind of note so common to

the scrap of paper is not intended for another reader. In notes to ourselves we often include lists of the things we need from the grocery store, the actions we must perform in a day and the ideas we produce or receive that we'd rather not forget.

When drawing someone else's handwritten note, Claire Greenshaw is suppressing her own graphological identity. This is not, however, an act of forgery. These are drawings. They are made with watercolour pencils, not pens. They are drawn on a white ground with shadow and texture to produce the convincing illusion that these notes are things in the world (stained, irregularly shaped scraps of paper, the backs of receipts, envelopes and record sleeves). The quasi-anthropological study of these notes as artifacts is reminiscent of documentary practices prior to the invention of photography. Like early botanical illustrations, the drawings go a long way to report on the particular qualities of each specimen. Of course in this historical moment, we know that each of these notes could be presented as a found object or photograph, less subjective in their indexicality and certainly not as labour intensive.

Like the drawings in this exhibition, Greenshaw's sculptures sustain a tension between the desire to present things as they are and to complicate these things through material transubstantiation. The orange peel in *Early One Morning* quickly gives itself up as being one step removed from the real thing. It is a cast whose form has emerged directly from the physical qualities of an actual orange peel and in this way it comes closer to the real thing than the drawings do. Painted to appear more convincingly orange-like,

it sits atop the conventional display apparatus of a plinth. The title for the work pits the humble quality of the orange peel against Sir Anthony Caro's iconic sculpture with which it shares a name. Peeled in such a way that it crudely resembles male genitalia, Greenshaw's sculpture also pokes fun at the machismo implicit in Caro's works in steel.

*So you let another guy knock a load in your bush and now you come crying to me?*

consists of a drastically deplumed Ficus Bennendijkii Alii, an indoor house-plant that has been vandalized using long and flowing strands of toilet paper. In this work, Greenshaw's manipulation of materials is far less labour intensive than the drawing or cast work. Through the provocative language of the title, the sculpture engages the charged sexual politics of normative monogamous relations while diffusing them through an absurdly literal materialization. The vulgar associations suggested in the title (possession, infidelity, pubic hair, guilt) are rendered all the more ridiculous through our encounter with this irreverent sculpture.

The works included in *Are you getting smart with me?* exhibit a persistent sensitivity to the cultural detritus encountered in everyday life. In an act of reclamation and recombination, Greenshaw manipulates the layers of signification that exist in each of these objects. Her shifting representational strategies imbue the subjects of her focus with humour and confuse their status as abject or discarded things in the world.

Paul Kajander  
Director/Curator



## Whose Museum

*Whose Museum*

*Whose Museum* is a transdisciplinary and collaborative project that has involved artists, musicians, animators, performers, curators, an anthropologist and a multiplicity of forms and mediums. The exhibition on display at the Helen Pitt Gallery is but one element in the whole of this creative eco-system.

The museum started its collection by soliciting concertgoers for items during **Collapsing Opposites** and **Bible Belts** cross-Canada 23-venue tour in 2008. Since then the collection has been expanding with each new venue.

For the duration of the show submissions will be taken at the gallery, and all contributions of art and ephemera will be accepted into the museum's non-exclusionary archive. Each piece accessioned is cared for professionally, archived and stored in accordance with traditional museum standards. The project serves as a thought provoking experiment in the making of an accessible, uncircumscribed, relatable and all-inclusive museum and may serve as a critique of predominant private and prohibitive museum ideology.

Joshua Bartholomew & Robin Selk  
ECUAD Coop Student Curators

Claire Greenshaw is a Canadian artist currently based in Scotland. She has exhibited throughout Canada, in the UK and Sweden at the Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver, The Khyber Artist Run Centre, Halifax, Mount Saint Vincent University Gallery, Halifax and the Neon Gallery, Sweden. She received her BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax and is currently completing her MFA at the Glasgow School of Art.

Collapsing Opposites consists of Ryan McCormick's vocals (They Shoot Horses, Don't They?), Laura Hatfield's drums (Better Friends than Lovers) and Jarrett Samson's bass (Role Mach). Please see them at the Western Front for a performance with Bob Wiseman on March 27, 2009

Bible Belts consists of Chris-a-riffic on rhodes (They Shoot Horses, Don't They?) playing distinctive piano studies alongside Alison Therriault's cubist drums (Chet, Dr. Storey). Together, she and Chris-a-riffic have been known to play anything from old gospel to punk.

For more information please visit:

[www.whosemuseum.org](http://www.whosemuseum.org)

### HELEN PITT GALLERY ARTIST RUN CENTRE

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Artist Run Centre  
Established 1975  
Tuesday to Saturday 12 to 5pm  
Wednesdays 1 to 7pm

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