

THREE WRONGS DON'T MAKE A RIGHT

NOVEMBER 16 – DECEMBER 28, 2013

THE EVERYTHING COMPANY

Three Wrongs Don't Make a Right is a self-conscious inquiry into the constructs of landscape within the tradition of western aesthetics and the history of picture making. This exhibition, which is The Everything Company's first gallery presentation since their relocation from Montreal to Vancouver in 2010, combines elements of the members' own photographic practices as well as a number of interests from the collaboration's earliest moments – particularly their investigations into masculinity in a Canadian context. *Three Wrongs Don't Make a Right* queries the nature of aesthetic experience itself and the historically laden roles of painting and photography in the fabrication of that experience. Each of the three works that together comprise the exhibition is "wrong" in some way. Purposefully scaled too large for the space of the gallery that contains them, these images and installation present viewers with hopelessly elaborate framing devices and viewing apparatuses. They playfully expose the ever-present (but so often cunningly veiled) gap between artist, object and audience and, ultimately, the realities of landscape as a social construction.

BEST GENERAL VIEW

The exhibition is dominated by an ungainly apparatus constructed of raw plywood and timber, which stretches to the ceiling of the gallery. Titled *Best General View*, the installation invites visitors to climb a narrow flight of stairs to a viewing platform, and then to peer down through a long aperture to a large, illuminated photograph of an expansive mountainside view. *Best General View* makes an overt reference to the work of nineteenth-century German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, and particularly his *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* [*Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*] (1818). Depicting a male figure upon a rocky outcropping with back to viewer and hair whipped in the wind, gazing out across a mist-wreathed chasm, this iconic painting is often used to diagram Kant's definition of the sublime. For Kant, beauty is discerned through the very form of the object. The sublime, however, is induced by the absence of form, or by its incomprehensiveness: by "formless objects" that provoke the idea of limitless.

Very soon after the philosophic articulation of the sublime in the eighteenth century, landscape painting (and then photography) became focused on inventing visual solutions to communicate the limitlessness of the sublime within the confines of the frame. Developed at the height of imperialist exploration in the 1850s, the stereograph – involving two stereoscopic photographs designed to give a three-dimensional effect when viewed through special glasses – was one such purported solution. So convincing was the experience of peering at the stereographic landscape that it claimed at the time of its invention to eliminate the need for tourist travel. The awesome sublimity of the New World's landscapes could now be experienced without ever leaving one's drawing room. The photographic lightbox, particularly as utilized by photoconceptualists such as Jeff Wall, also has a place in this history. One of the first artists to realize "the spectacular potential of the massive enlargement,"¹ Wall rejected the idea that lightboxes are in and of themselves "critical objects pitched against advertising."² Not unlike proponents of the stereotype, he argued that they are "a supreme way of making a dramatic photographic image."³

The Everything Company's *Best General View* is titled after Carleton E. Watkins' From the "Best General View" *Mariposa Trail, Yosemite Valley, Mariposa County, CA* (1861-73), one of a series of stereographic images using visual trickery to enable an experience of the sublime for a nineteenth-century bourgeois audience hungry for the dramatic. The Everything Company's lightbox also depicts the "best general view" of a contemporary west coast hike. But the cumbersome apparatus constructed through which to obtain this view makes the distance between image and viewer – as well as the frame through which it is discerned – is made ludicrously insurmountable and "natural experience" is haplessly contained.

THREE INCH HARRIS

For the past two years, The Everything Company has participated in an exhibition (organized by Vancouver-based artists Mark Delong and Tonik Wojtyra) held at the top of the Stawamus Chief, a 700 metre granite dome rising high above the waters of Howe Sound near Squamish, British Columbia. In 2011, The Everything Company's contribution involved the creation of cedar smoker backpacks, which at the summit they used to smoke sockeye salmon and trout, then served to other hikers on the Chief. Delong contributed a framed photograph of actor Denzel Washington. For the second annual exhibition, The Everything Company appropriated a documentation image from the previous year (which depicted the framed Washington photograph hanging from the backpack of fellow hiker Eric Hood). They framed this image, added leather straps and turned it into a backpack. This framed photo-backpack was then re-photographed on the mountain with a 4x5 camera, enlarged to monumental proportions and reframed again, to result in the present work on exhibition at Access Gallery, *Three Inch Harris*.

The title of this work – *Three Inch Harris* – refers to the style of the frame molding used in the finished photograph. It is purportedly the only molding that the venerable Lawren Harris – renowned as a key figure of modern Canadian painting and a founder of the Group of Seven – would use to frame his canvases. As is well documented, Harris and the other members of the Group of Seven set about re-framing the conventions of landscape painting for the purpose of inventing a national art in Canada, an independent aesthetic free from foreign influence. Their images of "wilderness" (and of the white male painter/explorer bravely entering it) were created for a country whose cultural identity was inseparably bound up with the geography and climate of its land mass. Such images were powerful fictions, conveniently absent of both the indigenous peoples who actually inhabited that "wilderness," as well as any evidence of the colonization and assimilation of which their project was fundamentally a part.

In her essay on the acerbic landscapes of the Coast Salish painter Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, Loretta Todd writes:

The land and the subject is framed, reframed or framed by being frameless, whether shown from the outside or inside. Yet the land is always outside the human experience: In the Canadian story and image, if the protagonist is rash enough to venture into the countryside alone...he has a harrowing experience...he heads straight back to town...there is nothing else – no new horizon, no beyond.⁴

In *Three Inch Harris*, the resolute gaze of Denzel Washington is a reminder of all that is left out of the frame.

MASTERY, PROJECTION AND OTHER FAILURES

The final pair of photographs in the exhibition is perhaps also the most complex. Thinking of those nineteenth century Euro-Canadian painters hauling their easels, oils and canvases into the woods to render the "natural" world, The Everything Company understands the diptych *Mastery, Projection and Other Failures* as a photographer's version of a landscape painting executed *en plein air*. Created using a painstakingly timed series of flashes triggering both the illumination of the photographers and the projection of a 35mm slide onto a pull-down screen, the images are preposterous in their staging. The photographers themselves are so focused on executing the elaborate tableau within the landscape – and of projecting their own image onto the land – that they appear oblivious to the scenery itself. For The Everything Company, such arrogant projection of ideas (and ideology) onto the land seem central to the production of Canadian identity in the majority culture. The illuminated slide, which depicts an image of the Malahat, a five-masted Vancouver-based lumber schooner infamous for run-

ning rum along the Pacific coast in the 1920s, is a reference to The Everything Company's earlier series of distilling projects and speakeasy events. The ghost-like image of this vessel superimposed upon the coastal landscape, however, seems to ominously refer to the entire history of white exploration, colonization and resource extraction enacted along this coastline.

As emergent artists working in Vancouver, a city with its own very specific history of landscape representation and a weighty lineage of critical engagement with of that history, The Everything Company nods ambivalently towards the legacies of Caspar David Friedrich, Albert Bierstadt, Lawren Harris, Emily Carr and Ansel Adams, as well as to Robert Smithson, the N.E. Thing Co., Jeff Wall and many others. *Three Wrongs Don't Make a Right* offers both a challenge to and admission of complicity with these powerful and problematic traditions.

¹ Julian Stallabrass, "Museum Photography and Museum Prose," *New Left Review* 65 (September – October 2010), newleftreview.org/11/65/julian-stallabrass-museum-photography-and-museum-prose.

² From "Representations, Suspicions, and Critical Transparency: An Interview with Jeff Wall by T. J. Clark, Claude Gintz, Serge Guilbaut, and Anne Wegner," in Jeff Wall, *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002), 222.

³ Loretta Todd, "Yuxweluptun: A Philosophy of History," in *Beyond Wilderness: Canadian Identity and Contemporary Art*, ed. John O'Brian and Peter White (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 345. Reprinted from Loretta Todd, "Yuxweluptun: A Philosophy of History," in Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: *Born to Live and Die on Your Colonialist Reservations*, ed. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Scott Watson and Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 1995), 45-8.

BIOGRAPHIES

THE EVERYTHING COMPANY (TEC) is a collaborative founded in Montreal and now based in Vancouver. Membership is fluid; currently active are Jason Gowans and Michael Love, other past and current members include Simon Benedict, Chris Dahl and Max Yuristy. Both Gowans and Love have individual photographic practices and see TEC as an outlet for ideas that are somewhat different from their solo work. Gowans and Love are also founders and co-directors/curators of Gallery 295 in Vancouver, a space dedicated to the presentation of emergent photographic practices. They see 295 as an ongoing TEC project. The collaborative practice of TEC has to date focused mainly on creating events and facilitating relationships; recent projects have included a year-long series of distillations and speakeasies engaging with various local Vancouver sites and histories of prohibition and alcohol consumption (and presented at the Western Front and 221A among others), and the construction of a giant, bicycle-powered cedar salmon smoking hut in downtown Toronto for *Nuit Blanche 2013*, wherein participants were encouraged to pedal for several minutes in exchange for smoked salmon. This will be The Everything Company's first gallery exhibition since the members' relocation from Montreal in 2010.

JASON GOWANS was born in Kelowna, BC, and lives and works in Vancouver. He received a BFA in photography at Concordia University in Montreal in 2009. Currently a photography technician at The Lab, he is co-founder and director of Gallery 295, and the founding member of The Everything Company art collective. Recent solo projects include: *Dumb as a Painter* with Tonik Wojtyra, Gallery 295, Vancouver (2013); *Five Landscape Modes*, Gallery Fukai, Vancouver (2013); *I'm Doing Everything I've Always Wanted, All The Time, Everyday*, Little Mountain Gallery, Vancouver (2012). Recent group exhibitions include: *Magenta Flash Forward Exhibition*, Various Cities (2013-14); *Romancing the Anthropocene* with The Everything Co., Scotiabank Nuit Blanche, Toronto (2013); *Nouvelles Géographies, Galérié*, Perception Park, Paris (2013); *Recreation of The Lure of the Sea for 40th anniversary*, The Western Front, Vancouver (2013); *Chief on top of the Chief*, Miracle & Connolly presents, Vancouver (2012).

MICHAEL LOVE was born in Chilliwack, British Columbia and is currently based in Vancouver. He attended both the University of the Fraser Valley and Emily Carr University of Art + Design to complete his BFA, and received his MFA in photography from Concordia University in 2009. He has been the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, including the Roloff Beny Travel Fellowship (2009) and a Canada Council for the Arts Research and Creation Grant (2010). His photography has been published in *Next Level*, *Prefix Photo* and *Blackflash* magazines. Love has exhibited his work both nationally and internationally. Solo exhibitions have included: *Artek*, CAFCA, North Vancouver (2013); *The Long Wait*, Fofa Gallery and Galerie Les Territoires, Montreal (2009), CAFCA, North Vancouver (2013); *I'm With Them*, UVF Gallery, Abbotsford (2006); *Limitations of Use: A Spatial Metaphor*, Lobby Project Gallery (2005). He is the most recent member of The Everything Company and co-founder and curator of Gallery 295. In addition to his artistic production, Love is also an arts educator at Emily Carr University and the University of the Fraser Valley.

EVENTS

OPENING RECEPTION - Friday, November 15, 2013, 8pm

IN CONVERSATION: Kevin Schmidt with The Everything Company – Saturday, November 23, 2013, 11am

Kevin Schmidt is a Vancouver-based artist whose work investigates the sublime and spectacular in nature, often taking cues from the tradition of nineteenth century Romantic landscape painting. He is also interested in the dichotomy between the real and the artificial, particularly with respect to our experience of the natural world. Schmidt's photo and video-based work has been exhibited internationally in both solo and group exhibitions; he was the recipient of the prestigious VIVA Award in 2008 and is represented by Catriona Jeffries. Schmidt will join us via Skype from Berlin.

IN CONVERSATION: John O'Brian with The Everything Company – Tuesday, December 10, 2013, 7pm

John O'Brian is a writer, curator and art historian. His many books include *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven: Canadian Identity and Contemporary Art* (with Peter White); *Atomic Postcards: Radioactive Messages from the Cold War* (with Jeremy Borsos); *Ruthless Hedonism: The American Reception of Matisse and Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*. Since 1987, he has taught at the University of British Columbia where he is a Faculty Associate of the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies and held the Brenda & David McLean Chair in Canadian Studies from 2008 to 2011. He was appointed a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 2009. In 2011 received the Thakore Award in Human Rights and Peace Studies from Simon Fraser University and an honorary doctorate from the University of Trinity College at the University of Toronto.

Design by Erica Wilk

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