

AFE: I'm definitely interested in both moving image and performance as separate streams. But I'm even more interested in the overlaps between them. I think I can accurately say that for the past three or four year, my favorite work has become performative video art. There's something specific about its strengths as a working method. Something to do with the potential for the exploration of an artists' own presence, persona, pushing the extremes of individuation within our mediated environment. How much more individual can one become than by recording oneself staring into the lens of a video camera, then posting that recorded moment to the web?

MK: That's an interesting observation. How do you think the use of web 2.0 tools such as YouTube, Facebook, etc. have affected the ways that artists and curators work?

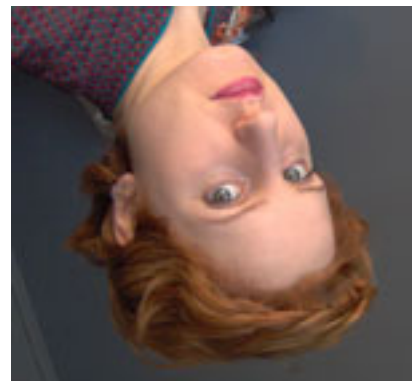
AFE: I think web 2.0 specifically makes remote organizations and people more available to self-organize with one another, effectively creating an alternate meta-community. I've had the opportunity to work with international artists and curators in a way that simply would not be possible without the new forms of information sharing and communication that web 2.0 offers.

MK: The shows you have produced indicate a strong interest in a combination of the moving image and performance. Could you tell us a bit about what draws you to this area?

I'm not an advocate of creative one-night stands

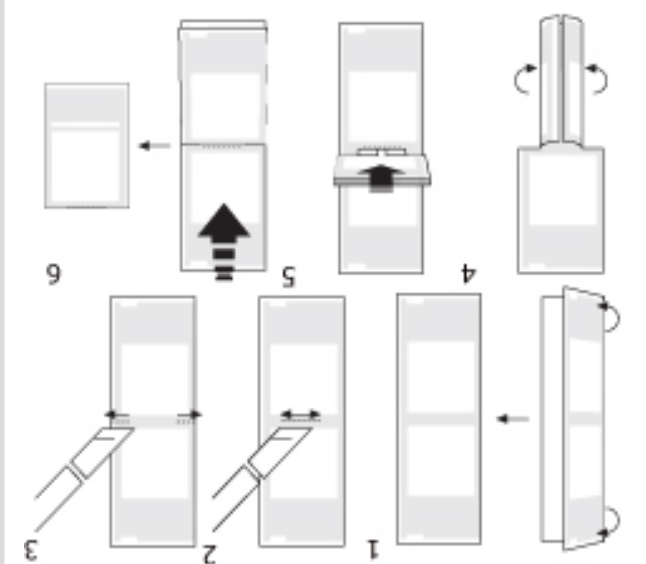
exploring, and to working productively and creatively together. I personally gain just as much from any artist I work with as they might from our studio visits, dialogues and arguments. Two artists I have worked with multiple times are Jen Hutton and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay. In both cases I would say it's more of an exchange than a mentoring relationship. In fact in the case of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, I would say I have been more of a mentee than a mentor throughout our six-year working relationship. I have learned much from observing his approaches and following his elegant example as a professional artist.

Alissa Firth-Eagland is Director/Curator of Media Arts at the Western Front in Vancouver, Canada, and an interdisciplinary artist curator who works in and between video, publication, web-based research, sound, performance, public intervention, installation and gallery exhibition. She has coordinated projects for organizations such as the TRANZ <---> TECH 2003 Toronto International Media Art Biennial, Fado Performance Inc. in collaboration with the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Cultural Human Resources Canada, the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre, the first annual Toronto Alternative Arts Fair International 2004,



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Alissa
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Michelle Kasprzak



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created on: Tue Sep 11 14:24:36 2007

Michelle Kasprzak

Curating info Conversations: Alissa Firth-Eagland

and the Images Festival of Independent Film and Video. In 2006 she was researcher-in-residence at the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art in Helsinki, Finland, where she researched practices of Nordic media artists working in hybrid areas between media. This was part of a one-year Ontario Arts Council Chalmers Fellowship for independent research into experimental curatorial models. Most recently she was awarded a Canada Council Independent Critics and Curators Grant for *Printed Video*, an artists multiple project that will explore the translation of the medium of video into print. A study of the moving image when still, *Printed Video* will explore videos potential as object.

Michelle Kasprzak conducted this interview with Alissa Firth-Eagland over e-mail in Spring 2007.

Michelle Kasprzak: How did you begin your path as a curator? Could you tell us about the first show you curated?

Alissa Firth-Eagland: The first show I curated was a co-curatorial project with Montreal-based Zoe Stonyk. We called it The Lady Show, and works by Toronto-based artists like Louise Liliefeldt, Joanne Tod, Sheila Pye, and Si Si Penalozza. Painting, photo, performance,

installation and video were presented in two satellite locations in Toronto: Art System gallery, and Vtape. I was in my third year of Integrated Media studies at the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD). After beginning volunteer work at the OCAD student gallery Art System, my creative focus was divided between curating and producing my own art projects in video, performance, sound. There I observed the intense curatorial dynamic between then co-directors Daniel Borins and Jubal Brown. They pushed buttons, broke boundaries, and even broke laws, with their projects. I watched them craft what I believe is a somewhat legendary reputation for this space. They used strategies I admired and strategies I reviled.

MK: Speaking of strategies, curators have at their disposal a range of strategies for working with artists. Your practice incorporates elements of both curating and commissioning. Do you prefer one process over the other? What are the particular benefits of each approach that you enjoy?

AFE: I combine strategies from both curating and commissioning. For me, commissioning seems to be on one end of a spectrum and curating is on



Images courtesy Alissa Firth-Eagland.

The **Curating.info Conversations** series is a collection of interviews conducted with curators of contemporary art. Responses to the dialogues presented in these e-books are encouraged, and will be compiled into a companion e-book.

Contact Michelle Kasprzak (michelle@curating.info) or visit the website to submit your response.

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the other. The critical variable is the shape of the relationships involved.

I understand commissioning to ideally mean that I have been given a chunk of money and the creative freedom to work with artists towards the production of something new and unprescribed pretty much anything we can come up with together. A solid commissioning program allows for creative flexibility on the part of both the curator and the artist. It also necessitates lengthy conversations and negotiations between the two. In this way, the relationship between artist and curator is quite intimate in a commissioning situation.

Curating to me means drawing from a set of known resources and existing, completed artworks. A good example is a call for submissions, where a screening, event or exhibition is comprised of a smaller group of works that have been culled from a larger pool of works. The relationship between the artist and curator is far more limited. If the artists work is obtained through a third party like a gallery or distributor, the curator/programmer and artist may never exchange a single email. This circumstance is simply not possible in a

AFF: I'm developing the Artist-in-Residence program for 2008 - 2010 at the Western Front in Vancouver, and exploring the translation of video into a printed form.

MK: What's the next project you are working on?

AFF: If there is one piece of advice I should give, I would say that travel is absolutely paramount to learning and expanding a curatorial practice. Google is definitely not a substitute for going places and talking to people. Not everyone can make it to Venice for example, but I think it's really worth making trips even to the little towns nearby your home base. I find that's often how you chance upon work which is really magical and surprising.

MK: Do you have any advice for aspiring young curators?

MK: Like many curators, you have worked with some artists multiple times. In these ongoing relationships with artists, are you acting as a mentor or is it more of an exchange?

AFF: I'm not an advocate of creative one-night stands. I find that ongoing conversations between myself and artists are critical to a richer understanding of the practices we are each involved in. In principle, commissioning also wins out for me because it also supports the production of new work, and thus must support and facilitate artistic practice and process. Curating is not necessarily responsive to or responsible for artists needs for these kinds of creative opportunities.

AFF: I prefer commissioning because it has the most open structure for the artist to curator relationship the conversations between these two parties can be over long or short distances, a whole gamut of technologies, and can be between two individuals or a large group. There could even be several artists in conversation with each other and producer. There's also far more trust involved on all sides.