

Selected Biography, continued

- 2005 Loblaws head office, Brampton, Ontario: three site-specific photo murals
- 2004 Centre for Jewish Campus Life, University of Toronto: etched imagery on windows
- 2003 Canadian Embassy, Berlin: image for glass tower
- 1999 Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care, Toronto: six site-specific murals
- 1995 Simcoe Place, Toronto: etched glass interior sculpture

Selected Bibliography

Articles and Books

Burnett, David and Marilyn Schiff. *Contemporary Canadian Art*. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1983, pp. 207-208.

Carroll, Nancy. "Barbara Astman, Sable-Castelli Gallery, Toronto, January 5 to 19," *Vanguard*, Vol. 9. No. 2, March, 1980, p. 30.

Dault, Gary Michael. "Photography: the impure narratives of Barbara Astman," *Saturday Night Magazine*, Vol. 93, No. 5, June, 1978, pp. 56-57.

_____. "Barbara Astman and Sharon Switzer at the Corkin Gallery," *Globe and Mail*, December 5, 2009, p. R17.

Enright, Robert. "Three Photographers: Barbara Astman, Ruth Kaplan, Lori Newdick," *Border Crossings*, Volume 23, Number 1, May, 2004, pp. 44-50.

Fulford, Robert. "Photography and its discontents," *Canadian Art*, Spring, 1995, Vol. 12, Number 1, pp. 56-65.

Holubizky, Ihor. "Barbara Astman – Jane Corkin Gallery," *art/text*, Australia, No. 60, February-April, 1998, p. 97.

_____. *The Clementine Suite*. Toronto: Koffler Art Gallery, 2006.

McDougall, Arthur. "Barbara Astman," *Vanguard*, Vol. 10, No. 9, November, 1981, p. 40.

Mays, John Bentley. "Barbara Astman at the Sable Castelli Gallery," *Globe and Mail*, April 22, 1988.

_____. "The secret life of picture postcards," *National Post*, September 8, 2001, p. F8.

Murray, Joan. *Canadian Art in the Twentieth Century*. Toronto, Dundurn Press, 1999, pp. 167-170.

Parkin, Jeanne. *Art in Architecture*. Toronto: Visual Arts Ontario, 1982, p. 125.

Pawlenko, Lydia. "Barbara Astman," *artscanada*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1, April/May, 1980, pp. 39-40.

Rhodes, Richard. "Toronto NOW," *Canadian Art*, Volume 24, Number 4, Winter 2007, pp. 67-68.

Swain, Robert. *Hidden Values: Contemporary Canadian Art in Corporate Collections*, introduction by Robert Fulford. Toronto/Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, pp. 84,141.

Tippet, Maria. *By a Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women*. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1992, pp. 171-172.

Wylie, Liz. "Barbara Astman," *Canadian Art*, Fall, 2003, Volume 20, Number 3, p. 139.

Exhibition Catalogues

Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton, Ontario. *Viewpoint: Twenty-Nine by Nine*, 1981, essay by Glen E. Cumming.

Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton, Ontario. *Barbara Astman: Personal/Persona A 20-Year Survey Exhibition*, 1995, essay by Liz Wylie.

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. *Colour Xerography*, 1976, curated by Karyn Allen.

Art Gallery of Peterborough, Peterborough, Ontario: *Barbara Astman*, 1982.

Centre culturel canadien, Paris. *Barbara Astman: Rouge/Red*, 1982, exhibition catalogue, with essay by Karyn Allen.

Koffler Gallery, Toronto, *The Clementine Suite*, 2006, Toronto, essay by Ihor Holubizky.

Koffler Gallery, Toronto, *Rock, is there something you're not telling me?*, 1990, essay by Ihor Holubizky.

McIntosh Gallery, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario: *Barbara Astman*, 1980, essay by Joyann Saunders.

Nickle Arts Museum, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta: *Barbara Astman: Places*, 1983, essay by Karyn Allen.

Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Alberta. *Barbara Astman: Red*, 1981, essay by Adele Freedman.

Barbara Astman's work is represented by the Corkin Gallery, Toronto.



Barbara Astman, *Dancing with Che: Enter through the Gift Shop*, 2011, detail of merchandise.

KELOWNA **Art** GALLERY

1315 Water Street,
Kelowna, BC V1Y 9R3
t: 250.762.2226
f: 250.762.9875
www.kelownaartgallery.com

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Barbara Astman

*Dancing with Che: Enter
through the Gift Shop*

May 7 to July 31, 2011



Barbara Astman, *Dancing with Che: Enter through the Gift Shop*, 2011, detail of merchandise.



Barbara Astman, *Dancing with Che: Enter through the Gift Shop*, 2011, detail of merchandise.

Protect Me From What I Want

A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.

– Karl Marx

Gallery visitors entering this installation by Toronto-based artist Barbara Astman will

each have his or her own initial reaction to and “take” on the work. Some people will immediately recognize the face of the notorious South American revolutionary leader of the mid-twentieth century, Che Guevara. Others may have no idea who this man is. Most people will “get” that the installation is set up as a faux gift shop, with key-chains, T-shirts, tote-bags, and all the other usual, predictable paraphernalia. But why is each item emblazoned with a black-and-white image of a man’s face? And what no one could realize without being told is that the image itself is of Che’s

face on a white T-shirt, which is being worn by the artist as she dances to Latin music. This act was performed before her own camera in 2003, after Astman returned from a visit to Cuba, where she had been struck by the proliferation of Che’s image. Known as “Che-chic,” the popularity of Che’s face on merchandise in some parts of the world is remarkable. Who knows how long this will last, however, as recently a colleague showed an Elvis Presley image as an example of kitsch to her art history class, and to her shock, most of the students did not know who he was.

Let’s look a little more closely at what is being presented – unpack it, as it were: we have a gift shop-like installation in which nothing is for sale. The objects have no price tags and their value is only socially conferred. As art objects, these items take their meaning and value from their context: they have been arranged for display in an art gallery and are therefore precious originals. But these items are actually mass-produced by souvenir makers, and have very little intrinsic value in and of themselves, the playing cards, small plates, pin-on buttons, etc. And are they, in fact, actually these objects at all, or are they simulacra, stand-ins for souvenirs, but not the real thing? As was the case with Alice after she passed through the looking glass, we find that we are in a place where nothing has a straight reading, nor can be counted on to actually be what it seems to present itself as.

What of the installation’s sub-title: *Enter through the Gift Shop*? This is a take-off, first of all, on the title of the Banksy film of 2010, *Exit through the Gift Shop*. We are all too familiar with the signs and experience of exiting through the gift shop after visiting a blockbuster exhibition (*Gems of Impressionism* or such like) at a big art museum. These little retail spaces are now an expected component of such a gallery-going experience, like dessert at the end of a fancy meal, a nice dollop of consumerism to round out our visit. But Astman’s title wants us to *enter* though the gift shop. And so we do, only that is as far as we get. There is nothing on the other side except a fire exit from the gallery – this gift shop *is* the exhibition. So where are we? Viewers may ask themselves, feeling confused, perhaps a bit like David Byrne in the 1980s: this is not my beautiful house / this is not my beautiful wife! Or like Monty Python of even earlier: my brain hurts! And they may find themselves inexplicably filled with desire to *own* something from this display, frustrated in their desire to purchase one of the items.

What exactly is being spoofed here? It is a fancy web to untangle and figure out. After a bit we might worry that we as viewers are not actually complicit with the humour of the work, but in fact might be the butt of the joke! Well, visitors can always relax and watch Astman’s video for a while, made up of stills of the artist dancing away in her Che T-shirt, now what was *that* about? Maybe something of a way to co-opt some of that macho Latismo power and make it her own? Anything is possible.

Eventually it is time to leave the art installation/gift shop, and take away with us only our memories. How aggravating, when we so desire a souvenir. After all, even certain tourist attractions are exciting to some visitors largely due to the themed gift shop merchandise they have to accompany them. Both Las Vegas and Niagara Falls come to mind as examples. There is something visually exciting and captivating about masses of a repeated identical motif. The image seems to underline to us our very experience of being where we are, and later whispers quietly: I was there.

Liz Wylie

Liz Wylie is Curator of the Kelowna Art Gallery.

List of Works

- 12 tote bags
- 31 coasters
- 31 buttons
- 62 key-chains
- 31 mugs
- 16 plates
- 18 sets of playing cards
- 20 T-shirts
- 16 decorative tiles
- 961 postcards (31 postcards of 31 different images)
- 5 tapestries
- 25 copies of artist’s book
- 12 copies of artist’s video

Selected Biography

Born

Rochester, New York, 1950

Education

1970 Associate Degree, Rochester Institute of Technology, School for American Craftsmen, Rochester, New York

1973 AOCA Graduate, Ontario College of Art, Toronto, Ontario

Teaching Experience

1975 Ontario College of Art & Design, - present Toronto

1978-1980 York University, Toronto and 1986

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2009 *Wonderland*, Corkin Gallery, Toronto

2007 *The Newspaper Series*, Corkin Gallery, Toronto

2006 *Clementine Part I, II, III*, Koffler Gallery, Toronto

2005 *Revisiting Red and The Clementine Suite*, Corkin Shopland Gallery, Toronto

Clementine Part I, II & III, Yukon Arts Centre, Whitehorse, Yukon

2004 *Barbara Astman: Clementine Part I*, Art Gallery of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario

2003 *dancing with che*, Corkin Shopland Gallery, Toronto

2001 *Paris Postcard*, Jane Corkin Gallery, Toronto

1999 *Dreaming Impressionism*, Jane Corkin Gallery, Toronto

1997 *Scenes From a Movie For One*, Jane Corkin Gallery, Toronto

1996 *Barbara Astman: personal/persona*, Art Gallery of Hamilton, traveled to Kamloops Art Gallery, Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Edmonton Art Gallery

Selected Group Exhibitions

2010 *Natural Disaster*, McIntosh Gallery,

University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, curated by Jessica Wyman

Art School (Dismissed), Shaw Street School, Toronto, curated by Heather Nicol

2009 *Still Revolution: Suspended in Time*, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto

Beautiful Fictions, Photography at the AGO, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

2008 *CLICK*, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax

The Luminous Body, Art Gallery of Peterborough, Peterborough, Ontario

Story Time: Narrative in Contemporary Art, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton, Ontario

2007 *Nexus: Histories and Communities*, Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC

Framed: The Art of the Portrait, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton, Ontario

2006 *American Icons*, Corkin Shopland Gallery, Toronto

Expressions, Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Kitchener, Ontario

2005 *Les Revenants*, Le Mois de la Photo, MAI, Montreal, Quebec, curator: Martha Langford

2004 *Identities: Canadian Portraits*, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario

Public Collections

Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario

Andrew White Museum, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton

Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton, Ontario

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Art Gallery of Peterborough, Peterborough, Ontario

Art Gallery of Sudbury, Sudbury, Ontario

Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France

Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa

Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa

Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown, PEI

Department of Foreign Affairs, Ottawa Gallery/Stratford, Stratford, Ontario

Government of Ontario Collection, Toronto

International Museum of Photography, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York

Kitchener/Waterloo Art Gallery, Kitchener, Ontario

Kamloops Art Gallery, Kamloops, BC

Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, BC

Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan

McIntosh Gallery, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario

Museum Würth, Kunzelsau, Germany

Nickle Arts Museum, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta

Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario

University of Toronto Art Centre, Toronto

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England

Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

Corporate Collections

CIL Corporation, Toronto

Connor, Clark & Lunn, Toronto and Vancouver

Deutsche Bank Collection, Berlin

Epson Canada, Toronto

Hewlett-Packard Canada, Ltd., Toronto

John Labatt Limited Collection, London, Ontario, and Toronto

McMillan Binch, Toronto

Nova Corporation, Calgary, Alberta

Osler Hoskins and Harcourt, Toronto

Polysar Limited

Sherman & Sterling, Toronto

UBS, Switzerland

Selected Public Art Commissions

2009 The Murano on Bay, Toronto: program of coloured imagery on windows