

WARM ICE

November 12, 2010 – January 9, 2011

Curated by Carla Garnet

**Michael Belmore, Deanna Bowen, Griffin Brothers (Clint & Scott Griffin),
Mike Hansen, Luis Jacob, Rae Johnson, Christy Langer, Paulette Phillips
Gretchen Sankey and Sharon Switzer**

WARM ICE is a ten-person show that intentionally highlights the inherent theatricality of works of art, both cinematic and object-based, to engage viewers in enacting their own readings of the multi-media works that comprise the story-bound exhibition. Taking the gradual warming of the North as its thematic starting point, *Warm Ice* aims to draw out the experiential qualities of the works on display, which simultaneously evokes moments and narratives “frozen” in time and the course of change involved in the process of melting or thawing.

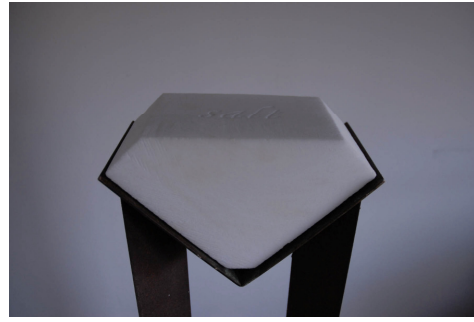
The wintery group presentation includes film, video, installation, painting and sculpture by **Michael Belmore, Deanna Bowen, Griffin Brothers (Clint & Scott Griffin), Mike Hansen, Luis Jacob, Rae Johnson, Christy Langer, Paulette Phillips, Gretchen Sankey and Sharon Switzer**. Assembled together, the works on display propose that acting out our relationship with the natural world may mean setting up connections with nature as a kind of allegorical theatre first.

Amongst a number of narrative threads, the *Warm Ice* exhibition loosely takes up the frequently told tale of the 10th century Viking King Canute, or Knut, who ruled Denmark, Norway and England. As legend has it, Knut wanted to demonstrate to his subjects that even a monarch was not all-powerful, so he had his throne taken to the seashore where he commanded the ocean’s tide not to come in; of course the tide came in just the same and his royal shoes were soaked!

The moral in the King’s gesture is that humanity is incapable of mastery of the natural world. Knut’s legend continues to operate as a cautionary tale about the folly of excessive hubris. Although precarious and provisional, *Warm Ice* asks gallery goers to translate the collection of chilly tales found in the art works on display into instances of larger shared memory.



MICHAEL BELMORE, *Facet* (2010)



The staging of *Warm Ice* begins with the exterior installation of Michael Belmore's *Facet* (2010). The freestanding outdoor sculpture is made up of three beveled diamond-shaped salt licks, each set into a copper plate atop tall steel legs and etched with one of the following words: "salt, copper, steel". Left exposed to the rain and snow for the duration of the exhibition, evidence that an elemental conversation between salt and ice is taking place will manifest over the weeks in the form of chemical stains left like tears on the sculptures' metal stands. Belmore's diamond licks act as dual melting symbols of wealth and agricultural encroachment upon the wilderness, setting the stage for the dialogue that unfolds inside the gallery.

DEANNA BOWEN, *Shadow on the Prairie* (2009)

Deanna Bowen's projection work *Shadow on the Prairie* is an interdisciplinary installation that derives its name and overarching narrative from the National Film Board of Canada's 1952 film adaptation of Gweneth Lloyd's "Shadow on the Prairie: A Canadian Ballet," performed by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet.



The artist overlays footage of the ballet – a Western Canadian settlement narrative that tells the tragic tale of a once hopeful woman's struggle with the harsh winter landscape – with letters and drawings derived from her own family's exodus narrative. This personal history, one which includes a family rumor about the artist's great uncle, a closeted gay actor & nightclub singer who played in all-black revues on Vancouver's supper club circuit in the 1930's through 50's, contrasts sharply with the iconic narrative revisited in Lloyd's ballet, recasting the harsh Canadian landscape as a metaphor for personal struggle.¹

¹ Deanna Bowen, Artist Statement, 2009.



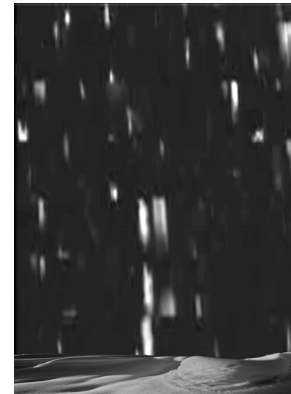
**GRIFFIN BROTHERS
(CLINT GRIFFIN and SCOTT GRIFFIN)**

Snowblower version 2 (2010)

Part Ski-Doo, part snow blower, part elongated children's sled, the Griffin brothers' fantastical snow machine has an allegorical quality, suggesting a mythic journey that seems to derive equally from the past and from the possible future. Appearing at once surrealist and utilitarian, the whimsical vehicle encourages the viewer to consider the role imagination plays in constructing our relationship to nature.

MIKE HANSEN, still from *Rosebud* short, (2006-2010)

Mike Hansen's *Rosebud* short examines the notion that spectators can co-author the artwork by playing a role in the work's function and purpose. As Hansen's video of snow falling on a North Atlantic shore flickers against the darkened gallery wall, the space the spectral film occupies fills with fake snow, drawing the viewer into the projected landscape.



LUIS JACOB,

Dance for Those of Us Whose Hearts Have Turned to Ice, (2007)

Luis Jacob produced *Dance for Those of Us Whose Hearts Have Turned to Ice* for Documenta 12 in Kassel, Germany. The recorded performance piece is based on the choreography of Françoise Sullivan, specifically her well-known modern dance piece *Danse dans la neige* (1948), and the sculpture of Barbara Hepworth. The video features performance artist Keith Cole enacting Jacob's homage to Hepworth and Sullivan in the buff in the snow-covered expanses of Toronto's High Park.²

² Robin Laurence, "Luis Jacob: A Dance... and Other Works," *The Georgia Straight*, November 22, 2007. Accessed September 4, 2010, <http://www.straight.com/article-119284/luis-jacob-a-dance-and-other-works>.

Jacob's work unleashes the storytelling potential of language, image, sculpture and dance in an exploration of how concepts of fate are bound up in contemporary discourses around climate change.



RAE JOHNSON, *Green Aurora, Cosmic Aurora*, (2008)

Rae Johnson's large-scale oil paintings give us a glimpse of what most Canadians can readily imagine, but rarely see: the Aurora Borealis. These coloured lights often stand in as a spiritual expression of the "untouched" frozen north.

Johnson is interested in tracing the connections between memory, imagination and emotion – in her estimation, the act of painting plays out these connections in a way that photography cannot. Writes Johnson: "the painting contains the memory through a corporeal imprint of the experience recorded in the mark."³



CHRISTY LANGER, *Reprise*, (2009)

Christy Langer's work exaggerates and manipulates the familiar found in nature to draw attention to the tension between accurate representation and mutable interpretation. Shown in the museum, the artist's symbolic animals suggest that they may already be mythical or extinct. In the artist's own words, she is interested in highlighting "the disparity between reality and remembered experience."⁴

³ Rae Johnson, *Aurora*, Artist Statement, 2010.

⁴ Christy Langer, *Reprise*, Artist Statement, 2010.

PAULETTE PHILLIPS, *Ursa Major*, (2009)

Ursa Major is part of Paulette Phillips' *The Open (Monster Series)*, a series of video works that merge the artist's recorded footage of animals in captivity with constructed landscapes, collaged from disparate footage collected during Phillips' travels over the past five years. In *Ursa Major*, the mythical Knut appears, in the form of the first polar bear born in captivity at the Berlin Zoo in over thirty years. The series reflects Phillips' interest in natural history and its complex relationship to colonialism. The footage for the work is shot in zoos and landscapes in Toronto, Montreal, Berlin, London, Rotterdam, Paris, Monaco, San Diego and New York.

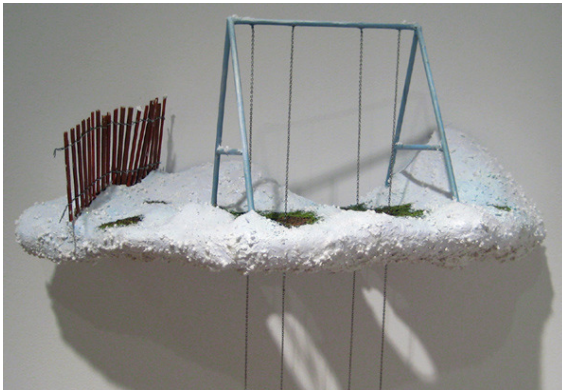


PAULETTE PHILLIPS, *Ecstasy*, (2001)

Phillips' *Ecstasy* installation presents a two-channel video that plays out on a glass shelf protruding from the gallery wall. The first scene, projected onto a section of the pane frosted to trap the spectral image, shows a woman walking through a snowy industrial landscape. Next to the projected image, a small flat screen monitor is set into the glass. The scene, which plays on the monitor, depicts the aftermath of the woman's actions, her abandoned clothes and her naked body lying still through a blizzard of icy snow.⁵

⁵Paulette Phillips, *Ecstasy*, Artist Statement, 2001.

GRETCHEN SANKEY, *Long Swing* (2009)



Like Phillips, Gretchen Sankey is interested in storytelling: how it helps us make sense of our lives, from whence personal narratives originate and the ways in which they mutate over time. Sankey's reality-defying model calls to mind the complex relationship between memory, environment and imagination. She has been exploring this material over the past fifteen years, her work informed by everything from cautionary fairytales to bible stories, urban myths and school-yard gossip.

SHARON SWITZER, *Little Town Blues*, from *Falling from Grace* (2006)

Little Town Blues and *A New Song* are two works from Sharon Switzer's series of multi-channel video works, *Falling From Grace* (2006). The filmic narratives play out behind two identical magnifying ocular lenses set into Victorian display cabinets hewn from polished hardwood; the viewer must peer directly into the lens to see each scene play out. *Little Town Blues* presents a video loop of a snow globe enclosing an iconic New York City skyline being shaken over and over again, in an obsessive and ill-fated attempt to keep the magic alive while tinkling out the titular show tune. Shaking the snow-globe activates the setting for an always too brief period of time. In '*A New Song*' two mechanical birds 'speak' to each other in a flower-patterned space that seems as far from true nature as the birds themselves. Together the works consider the relationship between culture and nature, specifically with regard to consumption and control."⁶



⁶ Sharon Switzer, *Falling From Grace*, Artist Statement, 2007.

BIOS

Michael Belmore is an artist of Ojibway heritage whose work explores the ways in which our relationship to the environment has been affected by technology. Born just north of Thunder Bay, Belmore currently lives in the Haliburton Highlands. A graduate of the Ontario College of Art with an A.O.C.A. in Sculpture and Installation, Belmore has utilized a variety of media including plastics, metal, wood and photography. An important part of his work, this selection of materials brings considered attention to the prevalent view of nature as a commodity. Belmore's work has been exhibited across Canada and resides in the permanent collections of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, and the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, as well as in numerous private collections.⁷

Deanna Bowen is a Toronto-based interdisciplinary artist and Lecturer at the University of Toronto, Scarborough. She received her Masters degree in Visual Art at the University of Toronto in 2008 and her Diploma of Fine Arts from Emily Carr College of Art and Design in 1992. Her work has been exhibited in film festivals and galleries nationally and internationally. She has received several grants in support of her artistic practice, most notably from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council, Toronto Lesbian and Gay Community Appeal, Telefilm Canada, and British Columbia Cultural Services. In addition to her artistic practice, Bowen has worked in the cultural sector for over eighteen years, at organizations such as the Images Festival of Film, Video and New Media, InterAccess Electronic Media Arts Centre, the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto, Point of View Magazine, Women in Focus Arts & Media Centre, and the Inside Out Lesbian & Gay Film and Video Festival.

Clint Griffin was raised on a farm outside Toronto, where he and his brother, artist Scott Griffin, created fantasy worlds in which to lose themselves. Much of Griffin's work employs reclaimed materials; In addition to his found object sculptures he has painted on photographs, wood, and books. Griffin shows with Katharine Mulherin Contemporary Art Projects in Toronto and Los Angeles. The artist's recent exhibitions include: *Clint Griffin* at the Gladstone Art Bar, Toronto, *there is not less than there is more* at Mulherin Contemporary, Los Angeles, *Scope Basel*, Switzerland and *Flirtin' With Disaster* at Katharine Mulherin Contemporary Art Projects, Toronto.

Working as a full-time artist since 1993, **Mike Hansen** had his first solo exhibit in 1985 and received his MFA from York University in 2008. Although he began his career as a painter, for the past decade Hansen has concentrated on sculpture and installation that examines the relationship of complex interplay between object and spectator. The artist's recent solo exhibitions include *Fleeting* at the Gales Gallery, York University, *Hoi Polloi* at the Art Gallery of Mississauga, and *Paper* at James Bard Gallery, Newfoundland.

Born in Peru, **Luis Jacob** moved to Canada as a child and went on to study philosophy at the University of Toronto. Evolving his theoretical inquiry through his art practice, he utilizes a conceptual hybrid of finding, collecting, and arranging images to form questions about existence, perspective, and social theory. Creating discrete works, image banks, multiples, and installations, his project is imbued with a deep sense of humor and compassion for humankind. Jacob is represented by the Birch Libralato Gallery in Toronto

⁷ <http://www.ccca.ca/nuitblanche/nuitblanche2006/artists/info/mbelmore_bio.html>

Rae Johnson has been exhibiting her paintings nationally and internationally since 1978. In 1981 she co-founded the seminal artists' collective, *ChromaZone*, remaining active within the organization as co-director and curator until its conclusion in 1986. Previously represented by the late Carmen Lamanna, she is currently represented by Paul Petro Contemporary Art in Toronto. Johnson has shown at the 49th Parallel in New York City, Galerie Walcheturm in Zurich, as part of *O KromaZone* in West Berlin, and in a show called *Bambino Miracolo* at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Rome. Her work was featured in *Toronto Painting '84* at the Art Gallery of Ontario, and has also been shown at the Art Gallery of Peterborough, the Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery in Owen Sound, the Robert MacLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa and at the Justin M. Barnicke Gallery at the University of Toronto's Hart House.

Currently living in Toronto, **Christy Langer** works primarily in sculpture and painting. After receiving her Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from The Ontario College of Art and Design in 2003, Langer spent time working as a sculptor, fabricator and art director in the film and television industry. She has since transferred the technical knowledge that she gained here into her art practice, resulting in the meticulous execution characteristic of her work. Represented by Christopher Cutts Gallery in Toronto, Langer has exhibited in Canada, the United States and Europe. She received Emerging Artist grants from the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council in 2008, and a travel assistance grant from the Canada Council for the Arts in 2010.

Paulette Phillips was born in Nova Scotia and during her career has established an international reputation for her tense, humorous and uncanny explorations of the complexity of social and physical energy and the contradictions that play out in our construction of stability. Her work has been screened and exhibited internationally at venues including The Tate Modern, London, The Pompidou Centre, Paris, The Berlin Film Festival's Expanded Forum, The Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris, The Ludwig Museum, Budapest, The Vancouver Art Gallery, Musee d'art contemporain, Montreal, the National Gallery, Ottawa and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. She is a Professor of Art at the Ontario College of Art and Design. Phillips is represented by Danielle Arnaud Contemporary Art in London and Diaz Contemporary in Toronto.

Born in Montreal, **Gretchen Sankey** received her BFA and MFA degrees from York University. As a member of the 23rd Room curatorial collective, she has participated in the organization of exhibitions in alternative spaces, notably *Duke-u-menta '90, '94 and '96*. Her work has been included in numerous national and international group exhibitions, most recently at the Robichon Galleries in Denver, Colorado and at the Rockefeller Arts Centre in Fredonia, New York. Sankey lives in Toronto and is represented by Paul Petro Contemporary Art.

Sharon Switzer's work in digital video comes out of many years of working in new media. A child of broadcast media, the artist's interest stems from knowledge of digital media's relationship to photography and other early representational technologies. The artist holds an MFA from the University of Western Ontario and recently graduated from the Habitat Interactive Arts and Entertainment program at the Canadian Film Centre. Her work was included in the 2006 exhibition *Oh! You Beautiful Doll*, at the Andrea Meislin Gallery in New York and is currently on tour as part of *18 Illuminations: Contemporary Art and Light*, an exhibition originated by the Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery, Owen Sound. Switzer is represented by the Corkin Gallery in Toronto.