

**Image and Memory:
Art About Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women**

Amber Berson

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ABSTRACT

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Amber Berson

This thesis discusses the issue of femicide in Canada, exploring the cause and effect of violence towards Aboriginal women and considers where the media and the government have failed to help families of victims to create proper memorials for those killed and how artists have attempted to fill this void. I explore how three specific non-aboriginal artists have, in this absence, created memorial projects, with very different results. These artists are Betty Kovacic (*A Roomful of Missing Women*) whose work commemorates the Downtown Eastside murders and the Highway of Tears disappearances; Dianne Anderson (*ProjectX*), who creates memorial performances for missing women in the Prairies; and Pamela Masik (*The Forgotten*) who calls attention the Downtown Eastside murdered women. I am aware that other artists have created work on the subject, notably Rebecca Belmore, whose work *Vigil* is widely known and Stan Douglas whose series *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* documents the disappearances. However, I have chosen to focus my attention on lesser-known artists with whom I was able to discuss the work personally and whose work centers eliciting compassion for the victims and their families.

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Claudette Osborne-Tyo (fig. 1) is one of an estimated 520 Indigenous women who have been reported missing and/or murdered in Canada in the last three decades.¹ On or around July 24th, 2008, Osborne went missing. She was last seen leaving the Lincoln Motor hotel on McPhillips street in Winnipeg Manitoba. According to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) “Osborne's family has acknowledged that she lived a troubled life. A young mother of four children, she became addicted to drugs and worked in the sex trade.”² At the time of her disappearance she “may have been with a john and ran into trouble.”³ Yet while the news focuses on Osborne as a sex worker and drug user, her family tries vigilantly to remind the public that Claudette Osborne is (more importantly) a daughter, a sister, a mother and very loved. Their Facebook page painfully states “Claudette is a mother of 4 beautiful children who need her to tuck them in at night and tell them she loves them. Claudette is a good mother and they need her home.”⁴ As of February 9, 2010, Osborne has still not been found.

Claudette Osborne-Tyo's story is not unique. Women are murdered by men every day. These cases constitute femicide or women killings, including “the approximately 500 Aboriginal women missing and murdered in Canada over the past twenty years, to

¹ Amnesty International includes 520 women (as of July 2009) in their count of missing and murdered Indigenous women. In the revised 2009-edition of the Stolen Sisters report, Amnesty International points out that “given the relatively small Indigenous population and the overall low rate of violent crime in Canada, these numbers are truly appalling. However, the Native Women's Association believes that the real number of missing and murdered Indigenous women is even higher than they have been able to record.” (Amnesty International Publications 2009, 3).

² CBC News Canada, “Family pleads for help finding missing Winnipeg sex-trade worker,” Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Website, <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/manitoba/story/2008/08/07/missing-osborne.html>.

³ CBC News Canada, “Family pleads for help finding missing Winnipeg sex-trade worker,” Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Website, <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/manitoba/story/2008/08/07/missing-osborne.html>.

⁴ Sabrina Chartrand, comment on “Information,” The Help Bring Claudette Osborne Home Facebook page, comment posted July, 2008, <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=36622606864&ref=ts>. (accessed February 18, 2010).

the sixty-nine or more so-called missing women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, to the fourteen women murdered at l'École Polytechnique in Montreal on December 6, 1989, to the uncountable acts of femicide, so commonplace and often so casual that they barely make the news." (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 14)

This thesis discusses the issue of femicide in Canada, exploring the cause and effect of violence towards Aboriginal women and considers where the media and the government have failed to help families of victims and to create proper memorials for those killed; and how artists have attempted to fill this void. I will explore how three non-Aboriginal artists⁵ have, in this absence, created memorial projects, with very different results. These artists are Betty Kovacic (*A Roomful of Missing Women*, 2001) whose work commemorates the Downtown Eastside murders and the Highway of Tears⁶ disappearances; Dianne Anderson (*ProjectX*, 2006), who creates memorial performances for missing women in the Prairies; and Pamela Masik (*The Forgotten*, 2004) who calls attention to the Downtown Eastside murdered women. I am aware that other artists have created work on the subject, notably Ojibwe artist Rebecca Belmore, whose work *Vigil* (2002)⁷ is widely known (fig. 5) and Stan Douglas whose series *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* (2002) (fig. 6), documents the disappearances. Other examples include For example, Sachiko Murakami's collection of poems, *The Invisibility Exhibit* (2008); Zoe

⁵ My choice to interview three non-aboriginal female artists is based on how I perceived them to commemorate and honour the victim in all three works. As outsiders, these artists had a privileged position of seeing the situation from new angles and bringing awareness to new communities. These artists were also willing to be interviewed, which did influence their inclusion in this thesis.

⁶ This is Highway 16 west, the 800-kilometre section of highway between Prince George and Prince Rupert so named because of the unsolved series of murders and disappearances.

⁷ Rebecca Belmore's *Vigil* investigates legacies of violence and the internalizing of violent behaviors. It is a direct response to the disappearances in the downtown East Side of Vancouver. In the performance creates a memorial by sanctifying a public space and then addressing each missing woman by calling their names. Belmore then nails her dress to a telephone pole multiple times and rips it off, placing her body in the place of the missing women.

Pawlak, painting series titled *The Profession of Hurt* (2006)(fig. 2), composed of the twenty-seven portraits, taken from the task-force poster, and imagined landscapes of the Pickton farm; Lincoln Clarke's whose series *Heroines* (2002)(fig. 3) which explores the lives of women living in the Lower Eastside, including many who later went missing; Stimson's *Bison Sentinel* (2007), a memorial to missing and murdered women commissioned by Casino Regina (fig. 4). However, I have chosen to focus my attention on lesser-known artists with whom I was able to discuss the work personally.

Memorials are usually thought about as sculptures, fountains or tombstones – permanent, physical interventions in space. Other possibilities for memorializing exist, and are often employed as counter-memorials or memorials by and for 'outsiders'. These are often ephemeral and rarely look like official memorials. It is common for official memorials to be created in the aftermath of genocide; because femicide in Canada is an ongoing and current issue, the memorials being created to open dialogue around the cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada are generally atypical.

In presenting the work of these three visual artists I compare and contrast their methodology, intent and public reception. I do so with the same anxiety that one staff member of the Cultural Memory Group voiced in discussing memorials to femicide victims: "In the back of my head I was always conscious of the fact that we were going to be critiquing this memorial, and there was a possibility that we would betray their memory" (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 27). While I will be exploring the works in question in the broadest sense of the term, I acknowledge with respect the courage of all artists and memorial makers in undertaking Femicide as their subject matter.

Missing and Murdered: Femicide in Canada

Femicide is a term that has been in use for at least two centuries. Diana Russell, co-author of two definitive works on the subject – *Femicide: the Politics of Women Killing* and *Femicide in Global Perspective* – cites the first use in 1801 to signify “the killing of a woman” (Russell and Harnes 2002, 13). She defines femicide as “the killings of females by males *because* they are female” (Russell and Harnes 2002, 3). Although not the first person to use the term, Russell’s definition is by far the most accepted, and the one I will use in this thesis. Gender violence affects all women in Canada, regardless of racial, sexual and economic background however, “Violence threatens social groups to different degrees. Women are more vulnerable than men, women in poverty more than middle-class women, women of colour more than white women.” (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 15)

Most writing on femicide in Canada begins with what has come to be known as the “Montreal Massacre” (McNeill 2008, 378) – the December 6, 1989 shooting of fourteen female students and staff at l’École Polytechnique in Montreal by an angered male whose application to the school had been rejected. Marc Lépine’s violence directly targeted women at the school as they, in his eyes, were responsible for his rejection from the engineering school by taking up limited seats in what he saw as a male vocation. The “Montreal Massacre” has been widely memorialized in a variety of public and private ways across Canada. In public parks and at university campuses coast to coast, communities mark the December 6th murders in ceremonies vowing to stop violence against women, at home and internationally.

Statistically speaking, the fourteen women murdered on December 6, 1989 represent a minute percentage of femicide cases in Canada. The “Femicide List” is a detailed listing of victims in Canada. The list was started by Mary Billy after the 1989 killings, but includes murders from before that period. Gwenne Hunt currently cares for the Femicide List and as of 2008 there were almost 3000 women included in it. (Rag Mag, The Rag Mag Blog, posted March 23, 2008)

Without diminishing in any way the significance and with utmost respect for the importance of memorializing the Polytechnique murders, I turn my attention to the lack of national public interest, and until recently, awareness, of the femicide of First Nations women in Canada. Racism, sexism and a general dismissal for people who operate in what can be referred to as the economic underworld have resulted in a general ignorance of missing and murdered Native women in Canada. While the Cultural Memory Group, based in Waterloo, Ontario, points to the all-around difficulty in raising public memorials to women murdered by men, they greatly acknowledge the “reluctance to support the public remembrance of women” which “redoubles in the case of societally marginalized women compared to women who, by class and race, are more securely positioned within the dominant culture” (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 16). An example of this can be seen in the case of a memorial to the victims of the “Montreal Massacre”, in a public park in downtown Vancouver. Resistance to the *Marker of Change* memorial (fig. 7), installed in 1997, came from those who felt the money could be better used to support local initiatives and to commemorate local murdered women, specifically Aboriginal women. Marion Dean Dubick reflected on the disparity of memorialization for marginalized women when she said “there’s people dying every day down here ...The

fourteen women in Montreal got massacred and that is horrifying, but look at the names on the list. All these women counted. We don't have Canada-wide coverage of all the women who die right here in the Downtown Eastside. Why is that? We're not university students. We're not across the country. We're right here. We're dying every day" (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 38). For a number of reasons I will address, Aboriginal women especially, but also the Lower Eastside women, have become marginalized and forgotten. In other words, their missing-ness was a factor before they actually disappeared.

A report issued in 2007 by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) titled "Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls" states that "Aboriginal women aged 25-44 are five times more likely than other Canadian women of the same age to die of violence," and that "in 2003, Aboriginal people were three times more likely to be victims of spousal violence than were those who are non-Aboriginal" (Native Women's Association of Canada 2007, 5). Lack of resources, extremely close quarters and collapsing infrastructure, high incidence of substance abuse, and an element of self-hatred all contribute to these statistics.

While non-Native men perpetrate most femicide cases involving First Nations women, Native men also commit femicide of Native women. This violence is rooted in internalized colonial attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples, Native men act out frustration, fear and self-hatred towards women. In *Femicide in Global Perspective* the authors argue "that the killing of Indian women by Indian men is rooted in the original genocide, conquest, and colonization of American Indians by Europeans and their descendants" (Radford and Russell 1992, 170). Perhaps contemporary First Nations people are

experiencing what scholars Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Lenyra M. DeBruyn call “disenfranchised and historically unresolved grief” – a deep -seated grief for which there is no acknowledged and accepted way to mourn, particularly in public. North American society has not provided the space or time to mourn the (bloody) colonization of the Americas. Brave Heart and DeBruyn assert that this is due to “the historical view of American Indians as being stoic and savage” and “the dominant societal belief that American Indian people were incapable of having feelings”, thus leading to a societal conviction that “American Indians had no capacity to mourn and, subsequently, no need or right to grieve” (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998, 67). In defining Aboriginal peoples as incapable of grieving and as a society who reject mourning we reject their sense of loss. Brave Heart and DeBruyn suggest that “the concept of disenfranchised grief facilitates the explanation of historical unresolved grief among American Indians. The historical legacy denied cultural grieving practices, resulting in multigenerational unresolved grief” (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998, 67-68). The trauma experienced through the colonization process was never processed and left scars on subsequent generations. The prohibition of rituals and ceremonial practices, the colonizers’ ignorance of grieving practices – such as the ghost dance – and the European nuclear family model which rejects the mourning of “ancestors and extended kin as well as animal relatives and traditional language, songs, and dances” (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998, 67) all contributed to an extended period of grievance among First Nations peoples. This has contributed to the present-day situation in many Aboriginal communities where there are high rates of “alcohol-related accidents, homicide, and suicide [...] Domestic violence and child abuse are major concerns among American Indian communities throughout the

country” (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998, 68-69). All this to say that femicide of First Nations women by non-native is statistically higher and is bound in much of the same reasoning as discussed above. "It has to do with how Aboriginal women [...] are perceived," says Raven Sinclair, a professor of Social Work at University of Regina-Saskatoon, "Canada is a racialized society and Aboriginal women; we live in a different world. We live in a world where a number of people believe that we're only sexual; that sex is our only purpose. We're also viewed as disposable."⁸

Tzvetan Todorov, in the essay “The Uses and Abuses of Memory”, writes: that “totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century have revealed the existence of a danger never before imagined: the blotting out of memory,” (Todorov 2001, 11). The history of Indigenous populations internationally has been tragically altered, edited and even erased and this has deeply affected First Nations peoples. The colonial and genocidal policies of the North American governments have left a lasting scar on the land and its original inhabitants. Descendants of colonized North America are still feeling the effects today. In Canada we live in what some might call a post-colonial nation and yet in reality, we live in a colonized one. We are no longer under the direct rule of the British, or the French, or any other colonial European force, yet the legacy left behind by these colonizers is in some respects, as damaging to our collective identity as a current occupation could be. When we consistently stand up for the rights and freedoms of Palestinians, Zimbabweans or other oppressed peoples without realizing that there are those equally oppressed in our own communities we are living in a colonialist mindset. In Quebec, we force First

⁸ Rory MacLean, “Saskatoon art show focuses on Canada's missing aboriginal women,” *Regina Leader-Post*, February 16, 2010, Local News.

Nations peoples to choose between living on a reserve, away from the city and the job security that it can provide. That we live in a society that allows the *government* to decide someone's identity demonstrates how far we have yet to come. In treating all First Nations people like second-rate citizens, as culturally we do, through forced segregation and 'othering', we oppress; and if First Nations people are oppressed, then in our society, Native women are doubly oppressed.

In November 2008 the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women issued a statement urging the Canadian government to take action towards solving the open cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada and towards shifting attitudes amongst the general public regarding First Nations populations.

The Committee urges the State party to examine the reasons for the failure to investigate the cases of missing or murdered Aboriginal women and to take the necessary steps to remedy the deficiencies in the system. The Committee calls upon the State party to urgently carry out thorough investigations of the cases of Aboriginal women who have gone missing or been murdered in recent decades. It also urges the State party to carry out an analysis of those cases in order to determine whether there is a racialized pattern to the disappearances and take measures to address the problem if that is the case.⁹

In spite of this call to action, echoed in Amnesty International's "Send a Wake up Call to Canada! Stop Violence against Indigenous Women Campaign"¹⁰ and AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development)¹¹, the Canadian government has done

⁹ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), "Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Canada 7 November 2008," CEDAW/C/CAN/CO/7, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/494ba8ce0.html>.

¹⁰ Amnesty International Take Action, "A Wake Up Call to Canada," Amnesty International, <http://www.amnesty.ca/wakeupcanada/index.php>.

¹¹ Kathambi Kinoti, "Canada's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women: A Shameful Indifference," AWID, <http://www.awid.org/eng/Issues-and-Analysis/Library/Audrey-Huntley-on-murdered-and-missing-indigenous-women>.

remarkably little to pursue the matter. According to Missing Justice, a grassroots campaign for missing and murdered women based in Montreal, Quebec, the Canadian government announced a tentative but “unanimous agreement to figure out a national strategy to finally deal with why hundreds of Aboriginal women have gone missing or been murdered in Canada in the last several years.”¹² No date has been set for this to happen however and the government has taken no action to date.¹³

Despite this, the call for action comes as welcome news for those who have been campaigning for justice for their family members and friends, only to have their cries fall on deaf ears. Gladys Radek, a community activist and co-founder of Walk4Justice¹⁴ has worked tirelessly for an investigation into missing and murdered women on Vancouver’s Lower Eastside and on the Highway of Tears. She began walking to raise awareness after her niece disappeared in 2005. After Tamara Chipman went missing the family tried to work with British Columbia police and with local and national media to locate her and to raise awareness about disappearance. However, the family found the police to be uncooperative and the media to be unresponsive. Like other families whose loved ones had disappeared, they were left to organize and fund search parties for themselves. The disappearances are sometimes complicated by red tape surrounding government and police interaction on reservations (as is the case of Maisy Odjick and Shannon Alexander,

¹² Mia Rabson, “Plan to Target Abuse of Aboriginal Women,” Winnipeg Freepress, <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/Plan-to-target-abuse-of-aboriginal-women-68541867.html>.

¹³ Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA), “No Action, No Progress: FAFIA’s Response to Canada’s Report Back to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 2010,” Canadian Women’s Health Network, <http://www.cwhn.ca/files/FAFIA%20Statement.pdf>.

¹⁴ Walk for Justice is a grassroots organization founded by Gladys Radek and Bernie Williams. They are based out of Vancouver, British Columbia. The organization works to raise awareness about missing and murdered women in Canada, particularly along the Highway of Tears and in Vancouver’s Lower Eastside where there have been concentrations of disappearances of women in the past few years. Their main project has been to coordinate a march from Vancouver to Ottawa in 2008.

of Kitigan Zibi, Quebec) but more often than not, the reason the response to help find missing First Nations women stems from their marginality in society. Radek is quick to point out the speed in which non-Aboriginal women and girls are searched for, and more often located, compared to Native peoples.

By 2002, more than 80 women were missing from the Lower Eastside of Vancouver. In late 2002, Robert Pickton was arrested on his farm outside of Vancouver and charged with 26 counts of murder. In 2007 the Pickton Murder Trials commenced; each trial would represent six women so that the families felt that their case was given the space it needed. In December 2007, Pickton was found guilty of “six counts of second-degree murder and was sentenced to six concurrent life sentences, with no eligibility for parole for the maximum 25 years” (CBC December 12, 2007). As of February 2010, no date had been set for the second trial. Vancouver’s “Missing Women Task Force” (fig. 8) calculates that there are still fifty-nine unsolved cases of women missing from the Vancouver area since 1978. Along the ‘Highway of Tears’ at least eighteen women and girls, a majority of them First Nations, have gone missing, although more than 500 women are recognized by Amnesty International and the United Nations. In both the Pickton cases and those from the “Highway of Tears” evidence of sexual assault is usually apparent.

Many of the Pickton cases (not all of whom were Native women) were engaged in survival sex¹⁵ and some of the women had substance abuse problems. While many, if not most, of the five hundred plus Aboriginal women missing in Canada were active

¹⁵ Survival sex is defined as exchanging sex for money, food, drugs, shelter, or other needs (Ditmore 2006, 146).

members of society, with families, friends and careers, some were also on the fringes of society. The recurring need to classify the missing women as sex-workers and drug addicts is problematic for two major reasons. To begin with, many of the women were not on the fringes of society – they were active citizens. Their perceived marginality is a result of their racial and cultural background and this discrimination is racist behavior. Secondly, when we ignore the cases of women who have gone missing and sensationalize the stories, because they *were* sex workers and/or drug addicts, we send a message that societally we do not value or respect people in this position and that if they disappear, they have no one to blame but themselves. According to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms Section 15 (1) “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.”¹⁶ The 520 cases of missing Native women have the legal right to a full investigation, and yet, the government does nothing. The lack of investigation is a direct result of the ease in which we forget those whom we consider to be on the margins of society. If and when these stories of disappearance were picked up by the media, it was too often to sensationalize the violence and tragedy of the perpetrators experience– the idea of humanely discussing the loss of a woman and its effect on her community is rarely considered.

While mainstream media were ignoring or marginalizing the cases and the experience of the families other outlets rallied to tell these stories. In 2006, Christine

¹⁶ Department of Justice Canada, “Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms PART I OF THE CONSTITUTION ACT, 1982,” Government of Canada, http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/charter/1.html#anchorbo-ga:l_I-gb:s_1.

Welsh made the documentary *Finding Dawn* through the support of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB). Welsh, a Métis originally from Regina is a writer and filmmaker “passionately committed to documenting the experience of Aboriginal women in Canada.”¹⁷ Welsh’s film is a tribute to the women who have gone missing and the women who fight for their memory. For Welsh, hope “lives in Native rights activists Professor Janice Acoose and Fay Blaney. It drives events such as the annual Women’s Memorial March in Vancouver and inspires communities all along the length of Highway 16 to come together to demand change.”¹⁸

The same year, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy approached the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to air her documentary *Highway of Tears*. The corporation did not pick up the film but Al-Jazeera International did.¹⁹ Obaid-Chinoy, originally from Karachi and with a background as a journalist with a passion for exposing human rights abuses, has said that upon moving to Canada she considered it to be an idyllic country, free of abuses and racism.²⁰ *Highway of Tears* was made as she developed a deeper understanding of race politics in Canada and led her to see that there is a serious class divide in Canada with an attempt to keep Native people on the lower end of the class scale. Repercussions from colonial invasion and the residential school system, caused “eradication of embodied cultural memory” and “worked, together with sexual violence against First Nations women and myths of cultural authenticity and racial purity, as a material agent of real and cultural genocide” (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 88).

¹⁷ National Film Board of Canada NFB Profiles, “Christine Welsh,” National Film Board of Canada, http://www.onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/portraits/christine_welsh/.

¹⁸ National Film Board of Canada Our Collection, “Finding Dawn,” National Film Board of Canada, <http://www.onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=52581>.

¹⁹ Leslie Scrivener, “Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy,” The Star, <http://www.thestar.com/article/166609>.

²⁰ Leslie Scrivener, “Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy,” The Star, <http://www.thestar.com/article/166609>.

History combined with poor social and economic conditions in many First Nations reservations have led to above national average statistics in suicide, accidental death, drug and alcohol use; poor health, including high incidences of tuberculosis, AIDS and diabetes; a high rate of infant mortality; high unemployment; and low participation rates in post-secondary education in most communities, resulting in Third-World conditions for citizens of a First-World nation. (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 205)

Both *Highway of Tears* and *Finding Dawn* serve an important purpose in educating the general public about missing and murdered women in Canada. The documentaries present the history of the cases and the struggles of the families for justice in a compassionate manner. Public response to the films is positive. While neither benefited from a cinematic release, they have and continue to be widely screened on campuses and by community groups internationally, raising the awareness of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada exponentially.

The media in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba barely covered the hundreds of murders and disappearances in its communities, arguably, because as Aboriginal women the common depiction of these women as members “of an underworld where people routinely dropped in and out of sight” and partly because they were women who “had no close relationships with immediate family and nobody cared about them when they were alive.” (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 206). These statements could not be further from reality, but they do represent the national sentiment towards missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Coverage of the Highway of Tears murders increased exponentially with Nicole Hoar’s murder. Hoar, a Caucasian tree planter from Alberta, was last seen on Highway 16. Coverage of her disappearance began

immediately after she went missing, and was met with no resistance by the local authorities or media.²¹ Coverage of Hoar's case surpassed the combined coverage of all previous cases, a reminder that "the contrast between the attention paid to Nicole's disappearance and that of the Aboriginal girls is a stark evidence of the invisibility and the marginalization of Aboriginal women in Canadian society." (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 207)

Helen Betty Osborne (fig. 9) was a young Cree woman from Norway House, Manitoba. She was living in The Pas, Manitoba, attending high school and en route to pursue her dream to become a teacher when on Friday, November 12, 1971 she was murdered by four white men

According to the testimony of one of the men, the four had decided to pick up an Indigenous woman for sex. When Osborne refused, they forced her into their car. In the car, she was beaten and sexually assaulted. She was then taken to a cabin owned by one of the men where she was beaten and stabbed to death. According to the autopsy report, she was severely beaten around the head and stabbed at least 50 times, possibly with a screwdriver... We know that cruising for sex was a common practice in The Pas in 1971. We know too that young Aboriginal women, often underage, were the usual objects of the practice. And we know that the RCMP did not feel that the practice necessitated any particular Vigilance on its part.²²

The Helen Betty Osborne case was listed as a 'cold case' in part because the people of The Pas harbored the perpetrators of the crime. A public inquiry into the case, twenty years after Osborne was killed concluded that the community's silence was at

²¹ CTV.ca News Staff, "RCMP seek mystery man in Nicole Hoar case," CTV NEWS, http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20090830/Hoar_search_090830/20090830/.

²² Amnesty International Campaigns, "Stolen Sisters: Helen Betty Osborne," Amnesty International, http://www.amnesty.ca/campaigns/sisters_helen_betty_osborne.php.

least partly motivated by racism.²³ Emma LaRocque, a Métis professor of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba has suggested that the attitudes of Osborne's killers, the non-Native residents of The Pas, the RCMP, the Canadian government and the general population goes beyond partial racism.

The portrayal of the squaw is one of the most degraded, most despised and most dehumanized anywhere in the world. The "squaw" is the female counterpart to the Indian male "savage" and as such she has no human face; she is lustful, immoral, unfeeling and dirty. Such grotesque dehumanization has rendered all Native women and girls vulnerable to gross physical, psychological and sexual violence ... I believe that there is a direct relationship between these horrible racist/sexist stereotypes and violence against Native women and girls. I believe, for example, that Helen Betty Osborne was murdered in [1971] by four young men from The Pas because these youths grew up with twisted notions of "Indian girls" as "squaws" ... Osborne's attempt to fight off these men's sexual advances challenged their racist expectations that an "Indian squaw" should show subservience ... [causing] the whites.... to go into a rage and proceed to brutalize the victim. (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 87)

In 1988 the Manitoba government initiated the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, created to explore how the justice system treated Aboriginal people. In 1991 it produced a comprehensive report on policing, legal council, court processes, jails and post-sentencing treatment of Aboriginal people, and on how "the relationship between Aboriginal people and the rest of society must be changed fundamentally... based on justice in the broadest sense" (Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, 1991). In addition the report acknowledged that Helen Betty Osborne case was marked by racism, sexism and indifference. By 1999 no action had been taken as a result of the Inquiry's report. The then newly elected NDP government formed the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission to form a plan based on the original recommendations from 1991, producing

²³ Amnesty International Campaigns, "Stolen Sisters: Helen Betty Osborne," Amnesty International, http://www.amnesty.ca/campaigns/sisters_helen_betty_osborne.php.

a new report in June 2001. The Cultural Memory Group noted that by 2003, however, a petition to the government of Canada charged that no action had been taken (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 84) and Amnesty International noted that it was “repeatedly told by Indigenous peoples’ organizations, lawyers, frontline service groups and others that they believe that the pace of implementation of the recommendations continues to be unacceptably slow.”²⁴

The films addressed previously are examples of the public stepping in to memorialize and to call attention to femicide of First Nations women, in the absence of any official memorializations. While the Canadian government has been slow to publicly acknowledge the problem of Native femicide, Canadian activists have not. Every Valentine’s Day for example, both First Nations and non- native women of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside organize a well attended public march for the missing and murdered women, “a performance of respect, remembrance and protest at the sites where women from the community have died violently” (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 21). This “different kind” of memorializing opens a “dialogical space” for remembrance across differences of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and ability while never forgetting how deeply that power differential “runs through the structures of culture and memory, nature and history” (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 21). Unlike other monuments and memorials, specifically those for the Polytechnique victims, which suggest that the violence is strictly in the past, “the Valentine’s Day demonstration is a memorial that refuses to produce a happy ending. Instead of telling a seamless narrative, it establishes a

²⁴ Amnesty International Campaigns, “Stolen Sisters: Helen Betty Osborne,” Amnesty International, http://www.amnesty.ca/campaigns/sisters_helen_betty_osborne.php.

dialogical space. The structure of memory that it suggests allows us to keep talking, but also to keep counting” (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006, 55).

Demonstrations, marches and documentary films count for only a portion of public initiated memorials for missing and murdered First Nations women in Canada today. In 2007, Brenda Anderson, a women’s studies professor at the University of Regina developed a course on missing and murdered women, cross-listed in women’s studies, police studies and human justice departments. Anderson also helped organize an international conference: Missing Women: Decolonization, Third Wave Feminisms and Indigenous People, drawing connections between femicide in Canada and Mexico.

Wyckham Porteous’s *Buried Heart Project* is a large scale recording project of songs written by Porteous and performed by celebrated Canadian musicians. Porteous writes that “motivation originally was more of a personal response to the reportage; I go by that area and I see these women a lot, so I had an awareness of the problem, even when it seemed the police weren’t really looking to solve the case. When the papers kept making the point that they died on a pig farm, something just clicked in me that these women were never treated with any dignity, even in how the news media were saying they died. That got me thinking that I could bring a bunch of people together to make a little memorial that would give these women a little dignity” (Jason Schneider, The Exclaim Magazine Blog, posted August, 2003).

Marlene Trick, who has helped coordinate the Vancouver missing women march, had plans for what was called the Lasting Memorial, dedicated to the women murdered in

Vancouver. This was slated to be unveiled in 2007 (Cultural Memory Group Staff 2006,

30). Trick's memorial project was never realized. According to Trick:

People were involved in so many other things following the memorial march each year. We discussed having a permanent garden as a memorial then the land prices hit the sky and land in Vancouver became an impossible dream. We even set up a web page but again unless there is someone to act as administrator it is impossible to keep updated, Next year will be our 20th annual memorial march. Some of the ideas we have kicking about are memorial banners or flags to be displayed throughout the community on telephone poles, the flags will be designed by women in the community and will mark the places women were murdered and in some of the cases the places women were last seen before they disappeared. I have an idea of the mosaic memorial wall that I would like to see happen in the Downtown Eastside, a place that can hold a flower a candle or mementos from the women's life. A place where people can read the names of women murdered. Designed by women in the community. Something to acknowledge what has happened to too many women from the community and stand as a reminder to work to end violence against women everywhere.²⁵

Amber O'Hara began several projects, including the missingnativewomen.ca website, the widespread Petition to the Government of Canada on the Investigation of Unsolved Cases of Missing/Murdered First Nations Women²⁶ as well as the Native Women Missing and/or Murdered in Canada Memorial Quilt, a collaborative project for healing and education.²⁷

Betty Kovacic:

Betty Kovacic is the artist responsible for a series of fifty portraits of missing and murdered women from Vancouver's Lower Eastside. Previous work by the artist on

²⁵ Marlene Trick George, e-mail message to author, March 11, 2010.

²⁶ Amber O'Hara (Waabnong Kwe), "Petition to the Government of Canada on the Investigation of Unsolved Cases of Missing/Murdered First Nations Women," Petitions Online. http://www.petitiononline.com/mod_perl/signed.cgi?tsalagi1

²⁷ Amber O'Hara (Waabnong Kwe), "Native Women Missing and/or Murdered Memorial Quilt," Missing Native Women, <http://missingnativewomen.ca/quilt.html>.

femicide dealt with the Highway of Tears murders, the highway which passes by her home in Prince George. While newspaper articles refer to her project *A Roomful of Missing Women*²⁸ none went into depth about the work so in October 2009, I took a bus to Prince George to visit Kovacic in her home and studio to see the work for myself. I was privileged to have the project uncrated for me at the Two Rivers Gallery, where it was first shown.

A Roomful of Missing Women was first conceived in 2001 but Kovacic's consideration of missing and murdered women began in 1997 with the painting *The Snake Casts No Shadow*. Because of the difficulty of the subject matter, both for herself the artist and for the potential audience, she was torn between taking the project on or not, but recognized that if she didn't these stories might not be told. In addition, Kovacic felt strongly that the subject chose her. In the catalogue for the exhibit Kovacic speaks of being accosted by images and ideas on the subject. In February, 2002, after seeking the support of her family and friends, she began to conceive of a project worthy enough of the women in question because "people must be grieved for and I needed to grieve" (Kovacic 2009). Kovacic had come across a short piece in the paper about the missing Vancouver women and was inspired to create commemorative works as a result. In the artist statement that accompanied *A Roomful of Missing Women* Kovacic writes "manifesting itself through many expressions the human condition all too frequently embraces violence and cruelty. This awareness has always left me shaken to the core."²⁹

²⁸ Betty Kovacic, "Links," Betty Kovacic Online, <http://www.bettykovacicart.com/links.html>.

²⁹ Betty Kovacic, artist statement, given to author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

Many of Kovacic works have taken on difficult subject matter. Her Millennium project *Legacies*³⁰, reflected her interest in British Columbia's aging population and consisted of a series of portraits. For it, she interviewed a cross section of people in the eighties and nineties and then painted their stories. She was drawn to telling these stories because in the excitement of the new millennium, the voices of the past were often dismissed. Other projects have focused in great detail on her mother, a non-Jewish concentration camp survivor and Kovacic's own experience as a child of a survivor. In short, Kovacic has chosen to pursue projects that have profound resonance personally and in the community. Kovacic's undertaking of *A Roomful of Missing Women* came about precisely because of how little was known when she began about the women and because of how few people cared. After the Holocaust in Europe, attempts were made to ensure that nothing like that would ever happen again. Kovacic emphasized in her conversation with me that as Canadians we remain ignorant and indifferent to the femicide affecting marginalized populations in this country and to the conditions that contribute to the sense of marginalization in the first place.

Using the "Vancouver Missing Women Task Force" poster (which originally counted fifty missing women and is updated yearly) and photos she found in newspapers Kovacic created a portrait for each of the missing women. However, Kovacic felt that simple portraits, for a number of reasons, would not suffice in addressing all the issues involved in the subject matter, and that she needed something more to symbolize the physicality of the women. Serena Abbotsway was the first to be painted, from a photograph in the paper

³⁰ In the late 1990's many artists, inspired by the Canada Council for the Arts (CAC) Millennium Arts funding, created new works under the banner of millennium projects. Although not chosen as an official CAC project, Kovacic refers to *Legacies* as her millennium work. It was awarded a British Columbia 2000 Community Spirit Award.

that originally was circulated through the Missing Task Force poster. Kovacic painted fifty women in no established order.

In a society that works to separate the majority of citizens from the ‘type’ of woman who disappeared – when in reality, there is no type, as the records now show – Kovacic struggled to find a way to connect herself and the viewer to the women. She wanted to focus on the commonalities between the victims and herself rather than to highlight their differences. Because the women had been marginalized in life, reduced to sexual objects, Kovacic felt she needed to honour them by reducing attention to this aspect of the women’s lives. In this way, the artist made clear that a series of decisions led to the lives the missing women had, but that these decisions are not clear cut and simple and that they can be part of anybody’s life (Kovacic 2007, 1). In the end, the exhibit was created as much to show the public who these women were and to educate them about Canadian femicide as it was for the families as a public marker of healing and memory. “My body of work was a place for public mourning,” a space for people to “realize that the women were human beings who loved and were loved,” and whose memory “needed to be protected.” (Kovacic 2009).

After the “Montreal Massacre” Marc Lépine’s name (the perpetrator) was widely known while the names of his fourteen victims (and the eight others who sustained injuries) remained unfamiliar. The same holds true for the 500 plus missing and murdered Aboriginal women including the missing women of the Downtown Eastside. We may learn their names but the public media-driven story has focused on Robert Pickton, otherwise known as the “Pig Farm Killer” and the possible other serial killers (i.e. the Highway of Tears killers). In her excellent thesis on media attention given to

Vancouver's missing women Melora Koepke states "public stories regarding human mass murder tend to focus on killers as operative forces. The victims are sidelined in their sheer numbers, and the glamour of violence is irresistible" (Koepke 2007, iii). Kovacic's project needed to be a place to grieve the loss and to commemorate the lives of the missing; to be a tool for healing in the community; and an entry point into conversation on the issues that allow for such disappearances. A project that began as a series of portraits to commemorate the victims' memories quickly developed into a larger project that both memorialized each woman while making clear the systemic and generally accepted violence towards women in our society. As Kovacic explains, "Functioning both as a site of de-objectification of sex trade workers and recognition of individuality and worth, *A Roomful of Missing Women* will keep safe the memories of the missing women. It will act as a visual reminder that at one time all of these women were someone's daughter, sister, lover and/or friend."³¹

Kovacic found that the missing women were objectified instead of individualized by the media. Historically, only important people or members of a wealthy family (mother, daughters, and sisters) had their portraits painted so Kovacic inferred importance onto the women by treating their image in this manner. She then had gilded frames built for each one, a move that added to the sense of importance of the subject matter. In the 1850's French artists Jean-Francois Millet and Gustav Courbet painted images of peasants – farmers, bakers, gleaners etc - in the grand manner and size reserved for those who traditionally merited being bestowed with importance. Millet and Courbet's work broke social barriers and presented the lowest classes as valued citizens while giving voice to those unlikely to be remembered by history. Kovacic's paintings act in the same vein to

³¹ Betty Kovacic, unpublished artist statement, given to author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

commemorate a group of people unlikely to be remembered (fig. 10). According to Kovacic:

Historically, the portraits allude to the social importance of the subject. Portraits also allude to societal emphasis of individualization and the power contained therein; although this section of society is completely devoid of economic or social power. Derived from a source that came into being only after public outcry demanded action, the photographs on the poster denote the loss, not the gaining of power. The large portraits, further emphasized by the subjects accompanying names, will reinstate power by the acknowledgement of identity and worth.³²

In the gallery, the portraits were displayed in order of the women's date of disappearance. Kovacic did not research the background of her subjects in advance. While she painted details into the works to individualize them, this was not based on research into the personal histories of the women, although she had read newspaper articles about the disappearances. The paintings were created intuitively. Kovacic chose not to look into the lives of the women because it was invasive; it was difficult for her to engage with the histories of women who had been murdered, because it would not be possible in every case and because in the end what mattered most was demonstrating the similarities between subject and viewer. After completing the project she read about each woman and remarked that many times her intuition about them (for example personal touches she would add to the portrait) would accurately portray the character of the woman. When we discussed this further, Kovacic gave the example of painting a butterfly in one of the portraits and then having someone who knew the woman personally remark that she had loved butterflies. It is easy to find correlations between reality and what the artist painted "intuitively" when these connections are drawn from such common tropes as a young woman's love for butterflies. While Kovacic drew my

³² Betty Kovacic, unpublished artist statement, given to author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

attention to the part of the story in which her suspicion of the woman's character correct, I feel that the families' affirmation of the portraits is the more interesting part of the conversation. In confirming the verity of the likeness, the family signs off on the work and shows that the work has provided a true memorial.

Kovacic experimented with technique throughout the series. Some are straight paintings – oil on canvas, while others are built up in layers, material and paint layered to reveal what is underneath – a metaphor for revealing the layers of life, achieved by incorporating bits of newspaper and other artifacts into the paint. She felt that it was important to show “each woman in a style and technique that expressed individuality. [I] explored any creative idea or process that I thought would achieve this goal. Each work was created with respect and grief for the loss of life that it represents.”³³ Other approaches included mono-prints on rice paper for the portrait of Marcella Creison; graphite on paper with Laura Mah; India ink for Dawn Crey; acrylic and photo, text or newspaper transfers for Mona Lee Wilson, Janet Henry and Cindy Beck; and objects collaged into the canvas as with the portrait of Diana Melnick. Kovacic also experimented by cutting into the canvasses, collaging drawing to canvas and explored various uses of different colour. Each portrait measures 16 x 20 inches– an important detail as then no single portrait carries more weight than another. By establishing a set size, the artist assured that each woman was given the same space.

The first summer (from February to August 2002) Kovacic painted eight portraits. She was incredibly driven to paint the women, in part to remember them for public record, but also as a personal undertaking. This was almost her sole project for five years, a difficult project both emotionally and financially because Kovacic self-funded the fifty

³³ Betty Kovacic, artist statement, given to author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

portraits, and she couldn't sell the work because of the nature of the series. In fact, she has encountered difficulty selling and exhibiting the works, an issue I will revisit later. Kovacic eventually painted fifty portraits in five years. For the exhibition, Kovacic added a wooden box (fig. 11), to symbolize missing women not included in the portraits, into which guests were invited to add names of women who had disappeared or were victims of violence.

The power of images to relate difficult knowledge is strong, but clouded. This is because photographic images and portraits cannot accurately represent truth. Images can present only a glimpse into reality; they are characterized as much in what they chose to show as what they ignore. The limitation of the image to accurately portray the absence of, or to demonstrate the individual life experiences of fifty women, was reflected in Kovacic's choice to extend the exhibition beyond the original portraits (fig. 12). In order to make clear what fifty missing women looked like – to make physical their absence – the project grew from a series of paintings to an interactive multimedia collaborative exhibit.

Victims of femicide have no power to document their own experience. They lose all sense of agency in their story and their voices need to be picked up by family and friends and also, artist-citizens. "For these reasons, images of traumatic events" and I would also stress, storytelling memorials to the victims, "have been considered the viewpoint of those who speak on behalf of the silenced" (Guerin and Halas 2007, 8). Kovacic cannot actually tell the story of each missing woman she depicts but she can try to relate her experience in relationship to the victims. Her project is therefore equally about femicide as it is about Kovacic interaction with its victims. Kovacic, aware that the image alone

cannot capture the loss, uses this mediated presentation of the missing and murdered women to aid the public in understanding the magnitude of the problem. While the image in theoretical and practical terms “makes present that which is absent.” (Guerin and Halas 2007, 9) it is the absence of care for these women that Kovacic is calling our attention to.

To create the exhibit *A Roomful of Missing Women* (not just the portraits), Kovacic sought financial backing from the community. She found that the response to her appeal was immediate and overwhelming. Kovacic believes that the ease in which the project was funded is because of the community’s concern for personal ethics and a sense of communal guilt of ignorance and acceptance towards violence towards women. The project was then proposed to the Two Rivers Gallery in Prince George, British Columbia, where it was first shown. The original proposal described the work as being:

A multi-dimensional, interdisciplinary conceptual body of work [...] created to address complex issues of individuality with the constraints of societal indifference and unjust judgment. Addressing many aspects of the human condition, this visual and sound installation will provide opportunity for contemplation, even confrontation; with the realities of the sex trade [...] *A Roomful of Missing Women* will be a powerful and complex installation that restores each woman’s individuality in the acknowledgement of intrinsic human worth as a living being.³⁴

To help make physical the loss of fifty women, Kovacic incorporated fifty blown up sex dolls – which are used as sex surrogates – into the exhibit. “Like the presence of real women, these metaphorical facsimiles displace space disclosing a physical verity not expressed by numbers alone.”³⁵ Sex dolls are almost life size (5’2”). When sex dolls come out of their package, their legs are open. Kovacic aired out all fifty dolls for one week in her home so that they wouldn’t smell bad and so that they would lie in position,

³⁴ Betty Kovacic, unpublished gallery proposal, given to author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

³⁵ Betty Kovacic, unpublished artist statement, given to author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

with their legs closed (fig. 13).

The women were perceived as disposable sexual objects, by their killers, but also by the general public, in life. As Kovacic's goal was to make clear that this was not all they were, she shrouded each with black cloth, meant to remind the viewer of death. Barbara Shultz, a local seamstress, helped design the hooded shrouds that Betty originally created with a slip on a mannequin. The headpiece was connected around the neck so that figure was hooded. Eleven feet of fabric was needed for each doll. The fabric had to be "rich and beautiful to be respectful"³⁶ and to convey a sense of importance for their subjects. A satin was used as it draped well with a good flow to it. Each doll was then draped with a banner (like that worn by a pageant participant) that read "As a child I dreamed of" with a quote from women in the community such as: "having food", "being safe", "being a dancer", "having horses" or "being loved."³⁷ The dolls and the banners reminded the viewer that the women in question had more in common with the general public than originally thought. Despite being objectified in life (leading to their eventual disappearances and murders) they can be honoured in death and their memory can serve to remind us of our shared humanity.

Interactivity between the audience members and the metaphorical women played a key role in the project. The dolls were mounted in the gallery in a way as to suggest movement; they would often sway. "Hidden from view now as in life, the figure's robes will just brush the floors. Suspended from the ceiling by monofilament that will allow for movement, interaction, even intrusion, into the audience will become possible. Give life

³⁶ Betty Kovacic, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

³⁷ Betty Kovacic, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

by subtle air currents, the fifty dolls will engage in constant movement.”³⁸ The viewer could weave through the mass of women, literally positioning themselves among the bodies, perhaps placing themselves in the shoes of the victims. Sometimes the dolls would seem to follow the viewer. When displayed in the gallery, the shrouded forms are hung so that from above, they appeared to be one figure.

Kovacic enlisted Broek Bosma, former director of the Prince George Conservatory of Music, to create a music component for the project. “I started with a basic twelve-tone row, twelve notes played consecutively without repetition [...] once this process was completed I had all the material needed to create fifty individual pieces that were all related through a basic root as well as a fifty chord ensemble piece that allowed each melody to be performed in the context of an ensemble piece” (Two Rivers Gallery, Bosma 2007, 27). A short piece of music was composed for each woman to represent her lost voice. Another longer piece of music was composed and played in the gallery. The short pieces (about twenty seconds each) were created with a synthesizer and the longer one with the help of the symphony. “The concept of individual voice, identity and worth will be further emphasized by the third element of music and voices. Representing the single and unified voice of each woman pictorially depicted, an original 50 piece motet will be heard in the gallery [...] that woman’s song, a metaphor for her lost voice.”³⁹

Deborah Poff, a professor at the local university, came on board to create soundscapes for the exhibit that were played interspersed with the music. She recorded approximately eight stories about violence against women (her voice and the voices of two students), showing the commonality and (sadly) the acceptance of violence in the

³⁸ Betty Kovacic, unpublished gallery proposal, given to author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

³⁹ Betty Kovacic, unpublished gallery proposal, given to author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

lives of women and girls in Canada. The work acted as a critique of the Canadian penal code which punishes sex workers but not those who seek their services.

Accompanying the exhibit a debriefing room adjacent to the gallery with a space to write, paint or draw responses to the work. These works were then hung if desired by the visitor on a wall in the reflection area. The room was outfitted with soft comfortable chairs, natural lighting, plants and quiet corners for reflection and processing of the emotions the exhibit elicited.

A Roomful of Missing Women tries to get the audience to relate to the subject by personalizing the experience. In *The Incredible Disappearing Women* (2000) Coco Fusco creates a work in memory of the femicide victims of Juarez, Mexico, who in 1999 numbered 220 and who today number over 400⁴⁰. In the play, custodial workers at a museum interact with an artwork created by a fictional male artist, in which he videotapes himself having sex with the corpse of a woman he bought in Tijuana. The museum is hosting a live restaging of the video with a mannequin in place of the corpse, and the women decide to have the last laugh by replacing the mannequin with one of them. As each auditions for the role of corpse, their personal stories of lived physical and sexual abuse surfaces. In the end, each is revealed to already be the victim (Fusco 2001, 202-220). According to Kovacic, and the exhibitions comment book, like with Fusco's play, visitors to *A Roomful of Missing Women* were often revisited by their own dark encounters with (sexual) violence. Kovacic decision to situate the viewer amongst the murdered women proved powerful.

Additional support events for the exhibit included a 'town hall' evening of "Hope and

⁴⁰ Amnesty International USA: Our Priorities, "Stop Violence Against Women: Demand Justice for the Women and Girls of Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua, México," <http://www.amnestyusa.org/violence-against-women/justice-for-the-women-of-juarez-and-chihuahua/page.do?id=1108394>.

Reflection” aimed at “sharing experiences both difficult and joyful”⁴¹ with representatives from the Prince George New Hope Society (an organization working at “Reducing Barriers for Womyn in Sex Work and Survival Sex”)⁴², and the Prostitution Awareness & Action Foundation of Edmonton, in attendance. There was also an organized screening of Christine Walsh’s *Finding Dawn*, an opening night artist talk, an evening of art, music and poetry titled *Living With Muses* involving performances by Kovacic, Boesma and Poff and a panel discussion between Betty Kovacic, Maggie deVries (sister to Sarah Devries who was killed in Vancouver), a representative from the Women’s Health and Wellness Program, Northern Health Authority, and Poff.

A further outreach project was carried out at a local school whose dropout rate (from crime, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy) was unusually high. *Portraits of Hope* was a project created as outreach by the gallery so that each student could make a self-portrait, similar in style and intention to the portraits Kovacic made of the missing and murdered women, to encourage compassion and as an attempt to prevent similar situations for these young people. The project was undertaken with students in grades six and seven. Having students relate the disappearances to their own lives is a well-documented therapeutic approach. Interpretive art, as the practice is called, allows young people to “reflect on their lives.”⁴³ Self portraits in particular are used as the participants “seem to enjoy it so much and also for the wealth of information it provides.”⁴⁴ This information includes how the child understands the situation and also how they see

⁴¹ Betty Kovacic, event invitation, given to author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

⁴² Prince George New Hope Society, “Home,” Prince George New Hope Society Online. <http://www.princegeorgenewhopesociety.ca/>.

⁴³ CAP International. “Interpreting Children’s Art,” Children/Youth as Peacebuilders. <http://www.childrenyouthaspeacebuilders.ca/pdfs/kind/interpreting-art.pdf>.

⁴⁴ CAP International. “Interpreting Children’s Art,” Children/Youth as Peacebuilders. <http://www.childrenyouthaspeacebuilders.ca/pdfs/kind/interpreting-art.pdf>.

themselves in relation to the situation.

Kovacic writes in the catalogue for *A Roomful of Missing Women* that it was her wish

To accomplish, in part, what the missing women could not achieve in life. I trust that the viewers will look into the face of each woman long enough to really “see” her, acknowledge her individual significance and embrace common humanity. Only as a society that honours everyone’s intrinsic human value can we provide safety for all and try to prevent something like this from ever happening again.⁴⁵

As the daughter of a Nazi Concentration camp survivor, Kovacic clearly understands the meaning behind the phrase “never again”. Her impetus to create the exhibit *A Roomful of Missing Women*, together with her previous projects and pieces, stems from a deep desire to prevent violence against women. Inga Muscio, author of the seminal *Cunt: a Declaration of Independence* (1998), speaks at great length on the subject of “cuntlove”. “Cuntlove” is basically a self respect for the self that manifests itself through self respect for others: “In a climate of cuntlove, no one feels ‘lucky’ it was ‘some other woman’ who got raped. There is no such thing as ‘some other woman’ when you have compassion and cuntlove for yourself.”⁴⁶

The Snake Casts No Shadow is Kovacic’s first work on missing and murdered women in Canada deals with the disappearances along the Highway of Tears as mentioned earlier (fig. 14). In it the snake is a metaphor for abuser (and biblically for evil). The pantomime face of the women suggests her inability to speak, and more seriously her inability to be heard as she has no voice in our society. Her big eyes represent having seen too much. Nails on the canvas represent penises, the sexual violence experienced by the woman – in the area representing childhood the nails point out to protect her. The apples represent Adam and Eve and how the man always gets away “Scot free” while the woman has to

⁴⁵ Betty Kovacic, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

⁴⁶ Inga Muscio, *Cunt*, (Emeryville, California: Seal Press, 2002): 168.

bear the violence and consequence. The viewers on the platform take no action, like the Canadian public, media and government who ignore the pleas of family and friends to investigate these crimes because the missing have no value.

The Snake Casts No Shadow the woman in this canvas looks strikingly like Kovacic. When asked whether this was in some way a self-portrait, a way to put herself in the shoes of the missing women, Kovacic said she had never thought of it, but that perhaps subconsciously it was so. In the work, the blinds are drawn shut, the work literally dividing the woman from the rest of the world. The woman has tiny hands and feet (signs of helplessness and inability to escape) but elongated body – the distortion symbolizing the violence to the woman’s body. Painting the victims of the Highway of Tears within the allegory of the Garden of Eden suggests that society believe that “women deserve it”.

For Kovacic “it was an honour to paint the women. I learned so much.”⁴⁷ Families of victims were unaware of what Kovacic was doing, but learnt about it in the same way as the general public. She didn’t want to invade the privacy of the family, who already dealt with some much media abuse. When families made contact with her they “just hug and cry a lot.”⁴⁸ Kovacic’s intervention could be understood as a form of activism. It spoke out against violence, against a society that allows this type of violence (femicide) to happen. *A Roomful of Missing Women* was not lobbying for the rights of these families and the victims, no changes in laws and no meaningful resources to help people avoid becoming a victim or to heal the families of the victims. Kovacic’s art and the supporting events and activities are way of dealing with an issue that touched her deeply but for which she had no other means of responding.

⁴⁷ Betty Kovacic, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

⁴⁸ Betty Kovacic, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, October 14, 2010.

According to Kovacic, some of the criticism her project received stems from the decision to use the police file photos, but Kovacic felt that this helped the viewer to confront the sense of bewilderment and distress in the women's faces. What's more, no other images were available to the general public, further marginalizing the victims. Kovacic noted that it is easy for society to accept pretty pictures of pretty women but that it is not so easy to be compassionate for the women in the photos. The painting from these photos further challenges our compassion.

Dianne Anderson:

Kovacic never worked with the families explicitly, but remained true to her desire to present a memorial of the woman's life, not her death. As such, *A Roomful of Missing Women* honours and respects the victims in a manner that is appreciated by their family and friends. Dianne Anderson, a photographer from Regina, Saskatchewan, worked with similar intentions. She is an artist, art educator and ad-hoc art therapist. Her interest in social justice issues caused her to take action in the cases of missing women in Saskatchewan. Anderson has always held a deep felt interest in social activism, "attending whatever meetings and such that came up in the community surrounding the issue of Missing Women"⁴⁹. Encouraged by a friend who, at that time, was pursuing graduate research on the representation of Aboriginal Women in the media, and by her own frustration with the "lack of action in the community,"⁵⁰ in April of 2006, Dianne Anderson began conceiving of a performance work to memorialize the women who had disappeared to help heal those affected by the disappearances of women in their community.

⁴⁹ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁵⁰ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

ProjectX is a collaborative performance (fig. 15). At its core, the piece consists of a large group of female performers, drawn from volunteers and family etc., creating two lines and then forming an X and chanting “It’s not right.” The performers, dressed in black, formed their lines within a designated space, cordoned off by the artist with yellow “caution” tape. The women exit the scene through the doors of a parked white car – a reference to the car many women were last seen approaching. ProjectX is a site-specific work, meant to mark the spot the woman was last seen alive and meant to purify it. It is both a means of remembering the life of the woman and of releasing the spirit of the woman who has disappeared without closure for those in her life. “The idea to perform on-site was an inspiration from many feminist artists who came before me who have used their own bodies to give voice to women’s issues...Suzanne Lacy, Coco Fusco, Rebecca Belmore... to name just a few...”⁵¹

The first performance of ProjectX was July 6, 2006 in Regina. The final on-site performance was on September 7, 2006. Working in tandem with ongoing events organized by the mothers and families of missing women, Anderson decided “that the most impact I could have would be to perform on the sites that women had last been seen.”⁵² The move to performance art was not straightforward – the artist was accustomed to creating behind the scene but was unsure of the shift to being an active participant. Performance and not photography presented a better platform for communal collaboration and for public intervention.

This is the strength of ProjectX which was created at the true intersection between

⁵¹ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁵² Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

artistic practice and experimentation and activism. In “An Action a Day Keeps Global Capitalism Away”, Edmonton activist Mike Hudema describes the collection of predominantly performative actions to enact social change. For Hudema, publicly performed actions create much-needed dialogue between activists and onlookers (Hudema 2004, 11). ProjectX makes physical the disappearances of local women through form and location, creating dialogue between the artist, families and the public. Public performance brings awareness, not least of all from the media, which view this type of action as spectacles worthy of report.

Although Anderson herself did not expect media turnout for the first performance⁵³, perhaps because of her recent entry in the world of performance art and the general lack of media attention given to the issue, they were there for the initial performance – although not for the third or fourth staging. Her only form of advertising for the performances was simple street posters and emails:

I was unprepared for the response as I didn't contact the media myself, but someone in the city paper got a hold of it and had put a notice on the front page the morning of my performance and I had a tremendous media turnout, in fact, it was quite disruptive. There were television cameras around the whole time, and at one point I had to get between the camera operators and the mother of the missing girl to prevent their intrusion while she was emotionally breaking down. There were even some cameras on the roof of the building beside our performance site, which made for excellent footage. We hit the newspaper and four television channels with our effort. The media coverage dwindled rapidly, with no coverage by the time we did our third performance, something that was rather unexplained but in some respects, better for the performance and performers.⁵⁴

⁵³ In an email to me (Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010) Anderson stated that she had mentioned the performance to a friend who worked at the CBC.

⁵⁴ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

The media coverage helped Anderson understand the reception of the project better and also to reflect on what had happened during the performance. “It was amazing for me to hear the interviews and see the performance, because I wasn’t aware of everything that was going on while I was performing [...] the mother of the missing girl was interviewed and said that not a day had gone by since her daughter had disappeared that she didn’t kiss her picture before she went to bed. And then she said she didn’t think anyone cared.” The coverage allowed Anderson to come into contact with other families, who approached her to reenact the performance for their own daughters.

The first performance (June 6, 2006) was in honour of Patricia Maye Favel, age 18, who disappeared Sept. 30, 1984, and was last seen at the corner of 12th Avenue and St. Johns Street, Regina. Through a friend, Anderson contacted Favel’s mother, who “showed up to perform with us and she was wearing a red shirt. So I put her in the middle of one line, still wearing red as I had run out of black T-shirts.”⁵⁵ The performance begins with Anderson reading the name and date of disappearance of the woman being honoured. The performers – there were twenty eight the first time, ranging from five years old to seventy - mark their spaces with chalk X’s – marking trajectories, possible sites of difficult knowledge, and their commitment to ending injustice.

At the end of the first performance, the missing woman’s mother performed a smudge ceremony- an act of cleansing, of dedication, and an act of spatial sanctification – and recited the Lord’s Prayer, to end the performance and begin the healing process. Anderson explains her process as:

⁵⁵ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

People asked me, when I was engaged in the production and work of performing, why I had decided to do ProjectX. I have a lot of reasons, but some of them really are simple, it was because I wanted to do it, and I could do it. And I had something I wanted to say. I wanted to tell the public, the communities involved both Aboriginal and white, and anyone who would listen that It's Not Right. So that became my slogan, and I discovered that there were lots of women that were willing to join me in saying just that. Basically, I wanted to make an X on the site that a woman was last seen, using women's bodies; an X to mark the site, an X to say that it was wrong, not right.⁵⁶

On July 15, 2006, ProjectX was performed for Amber Tara-Lynn Redman who disappeared July 15th, 2005 from Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan. Amber Redman, a university student with an active community life, was last seen in the parking lot of a local bar, where she had been celebrating her 19th birthday. The performance was scheduled "to coincide with an Awareness Walk that the mother had organized from that location to the Standing Buffalo First Nation Reservation that she was from, a distance of about five miles."⁵⁷ Anderson retained about ten women – including her daughter and daughter-in-law, some women from the arts and Aboriginal community and assorted friends – from the original performance, and these women helped guide the performance in Fort Qu'Appelle where forty-two people participated.

It was during this performance that spirituality took on a greater role, as Anderson, through dialogue with the Redman family and Aboriginal elders, learned "how to give the gift of tobacco to elders and did the same for the drummers before the performance started."⁵⁸ A smudge ceremony and a Bahai prayer were offered at the beginning of the performance. During this performance the chanting of "It's not right"

⁵⁶ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁵⁷ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁵⁸ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

was accompanied by the sound of traditional drumming, organized by Amber Redman's mother. After the performance, Anderson's family began pointing to the sky:

When I looked up, there was an eagle, circling over the performance site, accompanied by seven swallows. While we stood and watched, the eagle circled higher and higher until she disappeared, with the swallows staying in formation with her. And then, when I returned to the beginning of the walk, a pelican came and followed me and then went with the walkers as they began their trek. Later, my older brother was speaking to an elderly Native woman about the birds that came and she said that the birds were messengers. The eagle had come to say that what was done was good. And that it had went straight up to the Creator, along with the swallows, to take a message to the Creator. And that the pelican was good news for travelers.⁵⁹

Two weeks later (July 28, 2006) Anderson and company performed ProjectX for Daleen Kay Bosse, 25 years old, who disappeared May 18, 2004. She was last seen at the corner of 24th Street and Pacific Avenue, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Daleen Bosse's mother had contacted Anderson after the first performance "to perform for her daughter. Even though the site was two and a half hours away in a different city, I said yes."⁶⁰ Bosse's mother was organizing a four day walk from a Northern reserve into Saskatoon to raise awareness for her missing daughter, and the performance was scheduled to coincide with the event.

Approximately twenty-four women helped with the performance, including the female bartender who served Bosse on the night she was last seen, and family and friends of the victim. Male members of the family also joined in the performance; Anderson "positioned them at the four corners of the square and placed one brother in the west position, a significant position in the Native culture as that is the direction that one faces

⁵⁹ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁶⁰ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

when doing spiritual work.”⁶¹ This performance began with a smudge, performed by Anderson, the missing woman’s aunt and some friends of the artist. A Bahai prayer was also read. This performance ended with *My Heart Will Go On* by Celine Dion playing at the request of the mother and sons, while the performers exited through the car.

A young girl had come with the family and Anderson asked who her mother was and if she wanted to walk with her. “I froze when she responded with the name of the woman who was missing and was at a loss as to what to do.” In the end she walked with her grandmother. Anderson found this performance to be the hardest “emotionally and psychologically - the site itself was haunting, dark and provocative, large warehouse buildings on both sides and an abandoned rail track running through the street. The music echoed between the buildings and the early evening light was nostalgic.”⁶²

The final performance to-date took place on September 1, 2006 for Tamra Jewel Keepness who went missing July 5, 2004 aged 5, from 1800 Block Ottawa Street, Regina, Saskatchewan. The performance was held on what should have been the child’s seventh birthday. In order to perform in the community when the girl disappeared Anderson canvassed the area for permission and circulated a petition amongst the residents. She recruited a friend for this as she didn’t feel safe there, even during the day. “We encountered some co-operation but also hostility, especially from some of the white residents.”⁶³

The performance occurred after dark and the performers carried candles. After the performance for Daleen Bosse, her mother had given Anderson white T-shirts, which

⁶¹ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁶² Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁶³ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

read “Walk for Missing Sisters”, so these were worn instead of the usual black. Another substantial difference was that participants did not exit through a white car. Instead a friend built a small gate, which was installed in the street to exit through. The mother, due to personal circumstance, was not available to participate, but the child’s grandmother, who had contacted Anderson at the tobacco ceremony after the second performance, participated, along with three other grandmothers.

When Anderson tried to get residents of a senior’s centre to sign the petition, she met with resistance because the child had, in life, picked flowers from their garden without their permission. “Just before the performance started [...] my daughter and another girl went and picked some and placed the flowers on the gate.”⁶⁴ The performance started with a prayer, during which”

A large flock of white birds came in, settled in the trees overhead and made so much noise that we could hardly hear her prayer. Later, when telling of this to a friend of mine, he said that the spirits of innocents who had been harmed had come to participate in the form of the birds. And then a large black crow came and chased them away, just at the time that the Native elder gave his contribution, a shout to the Four Directions with his Medicine Wheel, followed by three songs in his Native tongue, one being a Song for the Grandmothers.⁶⁵

Instead of chanting, performers whispered over and over again the mantra of “It’s not right.” Votive candles were passed around and lit and then placed on the ground in the spot of the chalk X’s. The spiritual *Amazing Grace* was sung as the performers exited the scene, leaving the candles burning in the shape of an X.

During the third performance, a visiting Austrian couple in attendance had

⁶⁴ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁶⁵ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

videotaped the presentation. On the same night that ProjectX was being performed for Tamra Jewel Keepness in Regina, Saskatchewan, the footage was being screened in the couples' town in Austria. The screening was simultaneous. The couple also organized a prayer circle.

ProjectX was performed as much to remember and create awareness for the women (and girl) who went missing as it was to create a way for a community to come together after a trauma. People performed because they had a connection to the affected community. "The reasons why each individual woman participated were as varied as the women themselves...some because they had family members missing, some because they were mothers, some because they were daughters, some because they had gone missing sometimes in their lives."⁶⁶ Some of the women lived in the community where ProjectX was being performed but others came from elsewhere. The nature of the performance allowed people to get involved to the degree that they felt comfortable as well as to use the medium they felt appropriate for expressing themselves in (i.e. prayer, drumming, song, dance). Anderson's own daughter and daughter-in-law participated in each performance and her grand-daughter in one. The performers were always women but if the victim's male family and friends wanted to be involved, Anderson found them a "facilitator role – drummers, observers, drivers, camera people, etc."⁶⁷ All participants were volunteers and some joined on the spot, onlookers wanting to get involved. Anderson would give them a black t-shirt and they would join in the X. For Anderson "the performances were meant as a bridging – between and within community – by pulling women from the onlookers themselves, the performance would accomplish the

⁶⁶ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁶⁷ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

'bridge'."⁶⁸

Anderson contacted the family of Patricia Maye Favel, who eagerly participated. After this initial performance the other families invited Anderson to create memorials for their daughter. "Out of respect and consideration for their grief and the missing woman in their lives. I guess you could say that I solicited the families of the missing women. It could not have happened any other way. The traditions of each family and each community had to be respected and I acquired familial permission before planning any of the performances."⁶⁹ Anderson "was, and continues to be, humbled by their courage in welcoming myself and the other women into their communities, sharing their spiritual beliefs, their hopes and their lives with us. Their bravery in taking their places in my performances left me speechless and still does."⁷⁰

Reception for ProjectX was both positive and negative. Anderson and company were met with hostility from the Saskatoon police but outstanding support in Regina and Fort Qu'Appelle. Within each community, particularly in the case of the performance in Regina for Tama Keepness, there was mixed reception "some genuine hostilities mixed in with genuine grief, love, and kindness."⁷¹ The most resistance Anderson encountered was in Saskatoon:

I had been in direct communication with someone way up in the Saskatoon City Office in order to get all the clearances and such so that we could block off streets, etc. [...] He assured me that I was following all the required steps [...] I received an email a couple days before I was to

⁶⁸ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁶⁹ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁷⁰ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁷¹ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

perform from that guy up in Saskatoon denying me the right to perform until I could produce proof of a million dollar public liability insurance [...] I made the deadline but only through the incredible dedication of the people around me...the ones who cared whether we performed or not.⁷²

Anderson, who had taught university art classes at the University of Regina, received tremendous support from several past students and colleagues and from some of the female First Nations artists in the community. However, one art colleague asked Anderson whether this type of performance was still relevant today, as social activism work was something second-wave feminists had been actively engaged with.⁷³ Without wanting to answer for Anderson, perhaps the relevance is based precisely in the subject and the audience. Performance art of the 1970's was successful in changing current attitudes about gender, race and sexuality – perhaps using the same tactics will shift contemporary attitudes towards Aboriginal people in Canada.

The female performers of ProjectX all felt changed by their participation; Anderson stated that “it was one that they would never forget. Even today, when I speak to some of the women who were involved, they speak of the impact that ProjectX had on their perception of the world around them.”⁷⁴

Anderson originally intended to create more on-site performances, but Project X took incredible time and commitment. The project lives on in dialogue only. Today Anderson lives in Nipawin, Saskatchewan, and uses ProjectX as a “platform to use for community engagement. I have presented it to a local bank staff meeting as a Cultural Awareness seminar. Nipawin is a typical Northern ‘white’ settlement – we deal heavily

⁷² Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁷³ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁷⁴ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

with several Northern reserves, a large First Nation population within the town – we bridge reserves that have a long historical past with ‘white’ settlement and trade.”⁷⁵ Bringing the work to a community not dealing first hand with the trauma of a missing woman allows Anderson to bring a different type of awareness. ProjectX acts as an alternative to typical media depictions of the missing and murdered women and challenges the general perception that no-one cared for the women. Despite the ongoing dialogue, Anderson ultimately sees ProjectX as an unfinished, evolving project in “the pursuit of healing...spiritually and physically.”⁷⁶

Pamela Masik:

The Forgotten differs considerably from Masik’s central body of work. Generally, her works are abstract, glossy, beautiful, and corporate oriented. Performance is central to the work – specifically, the artist rents herself out for events for live paintings. The artist wears a beautiful dress, and then engages in a very primal exhibition of slash and splatter painting on a wall size canvas.

I visited Masik in her Vancouver studio in October 2009. The studio is located a few blocks from the central bus station, off Main Street, on a dead-end block of industrial buildings. To access the studio, one must enter a gated parking lot and find the appropriate lot number. One gets the impression on visiting that very few people come to the studio on foot and I could not help but consider the fact that I was walking in a very isolated part of downtown Vancouver, blocks from where many women had disappeared, and that I was, in a small way, putting myself at risk to visit the studio. I asked Masik

⁷⁵ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

⁷⁶ Dianne Anderson, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2010.

what her thoughts were about working on the series in an area that invokes a sense of fear and conjures up the memory of those who have disappeared. She said it had not occurred to her as being a particularly dangerous location and did not see a connection between the women missing from Vancouver's Lower Eastside, who in many cases were taken from the desolate work places of alleyways and parking lots near her studio's location.

Pamela Masik began *The Forgotten* (fig. 16), her series dedicated to the missing and murdered women of Vancouver's Lower Eastside in 2005, although she began considering taking on such an effort in late 2004. The project consists of sixty-nine portraits of missing women representing the way in which they were murdered, based on newspaper reports. Sixty-nine represents the number of women missing and represented by the Missing Task Force poster, at the time Masik began her project. The artist chose not to add women as new cases came to light over the course of the project. At the same time, Masik decided to retain the portrait of a young woman who had been found alive as part of the series.

The works are larger than life, generally measuring around 10 feet tall and 8 feet wide, although the canvases vary in size. Masik experimented with canvas size before beginning the series, trying to fit the work onto a smaller scale. In the end, she chose to paint large portraits because the scale forced the viewer to confront the image of the woman in front of them.

For the series Masik explored approximately eight different painting styles many of which, while remaining portraits, are highly abstracted images. When the portrait is obscured by layers of symbol, especially when so large, it becomes easy to ignore the

reality of what is being shown. That is to say it is easy to forget that what is being shown is a portrait of an actual woman who has recently been murdered, specifically because it is so large and ornamented. Masik makes no attempt to actually hide who she is painting and actively calls attention to it in other ways. Her choice of canvas size came from a desire to bring more attention to the victims who had been as forgotten in death as they had been ignored in life. The social injustice of the reality of the victims' lives is meant to be partially alleviated by this forced intimacy.

Masik painted the women in no established order, approaching new paintings as she developed ideas for their portrait and generally working on more than one portrait at a time. In fact, the series is not yet complete as Masik continues to add elements to several pieces. From the beginning, Masik used the images available in the media (from newspapers and the task force poster) but then painted them "intuitively."⁷⁷ Masik's process involved building up the paint on her canvas so that several seem three-dimensional. She experimented with eight different painting techniques over the course of the series.

The results are, on the surface, comfortable images, depicting difficult subject matter. Perhaps this is why Masik's series has been so successful; it is easy to ignore what you are looking at, and to focus on the skill of the painter. This reaction to violent imagery has been much discussed in analysis of horror films and has been thematically integrated into the genre. For example, in *Murder as Art/The Art of Murder: Aestheticising Violence in Modern Cinematic Horror*, Steven Jay Schneider writes "in *Peeping Tom*, an otherwise unremarkable young man [...] murders young women with a

⁷⁷ Pamela Masik, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, October 16, 2010.

retractable spike attached to a movie camera. Also affixed to the camera is a small mirror which enables him to record the terrified expressions on his victim's faces as they watch themselves getting killed."⁷⁸ The viewer, like the murderer, aestheticizes the experience in a way that facilitates ignoring the violence on screen. Masik makes her subject matter so beautiful that the viewer might be able to forget that the woman's head dripping blood into a bucket in a painting is showing an actual woman who was beheaded and whose head was later found, in a bucket. (fig. 17) A woman who was found ground up like pork and packaged in cellophane and Styrofoam on the Pickton farm is depicted by Masik as a floating head painted with a crinkle effect mimicking ground meat. When I visited the studio in October, Masik told me that for an upcoming show she planned to wrap the canvas in cellophane and stamp a Best-before date on (in this case the date of the woman's disappearance) (fig. 18).

The paintings never shy away from graphic depictions of the violence inflicted on the women (fig. 19). Masik hopes for this to encourage compassion amongst viewers, but in the end, it might only serve to sensationalize the violence. Like the newspaper articles about the Vancouver women, which speak easily about the killer and the crimes committed towards the women but shy away from considerations of the woman as individual or more than a sex-worker, Masik's paintings use the glamour of violence to create frenzy. And the frenzy for the work is not out of interest in the victims, but in Masik as artist. It should come as no surprise that families of the victims have been less than enthusiastic about Masik's series. Her only contact with friends or family of the

⁷⁸ Steven Jay Schneider, "Murder as Art/The Art of Murder: Aestheticising Violence in Modern Cinematic Horror," *Intensities Three Journal*, <http://intensities.org/Essays/Schneider.pdf>.

women has been negative. The work “talks about the physicality of the murder,” and shows “evidence of violence.”⁷⁹ Masik does not shy away from taboo in this work, being as graphic as she can be, hoping to shock the viewer into action. Where Masik hopes the graphic symbolism and expressions of violence will invite the viewer in to learn more, they often have the opposite effect. Combined with the scale of the canvas the audience is confronted with an image too abstract to know intimately. In the end Masik’s paintings, despite their opposite intention, could be criticized for further marginalizing their subjects.

Masik points out that the larger than life portraits create a sense of the *viewer* being on display rather than the subject of the painting. Having the faces of murdered women stare the viewer down is certainly powerful and tends to cause a sense of discomfort for those looking as the scale is imposing. While Masik intended the viewer to spend more time with the works because of this, it is not always the case. The works are so large and looming that as a viewer, I felt like a voyeur observing the pain of the victim, as if it was me who had committed the crime. It is impossible to ignore the women, but it is difficult to develop a sense of compassion for them either. Compassion, to be clear, is what Masik is aiming at, and yet, compassion - “an overtly emotional bond that is both the justification and the catalyst for action” (Wright 2009, 219) is not realized. Melissa Wright, in “Justice and the geographies of moral protest: reflections from Mexico,” points out that:

Within the anti-femicide movement of northern Mexico, this challenge has been met with a calculated decision to present the victims and atrocities as a matter of familial loss and struggle. Such a strategy is built upon the idea

⁷⁹ Pamela Masik, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, October 16, 2010.

of the family and familial loss as such fundamentally human experiences that they evoke compassion even among the most distant of strangers. For this reason, the victims do not appear within the testimonial presentation as just anyone. The mother-activists do not declare: 'Someone is missing!' Instead, the unspeakable acts of horror, torture, and brutality are sounded within the alarm: 'My daughter is missing'; 'My child was murdered'; 'My daughter was raped and tortured'. And such declarations then correspond to the justice demanded: 'We want her back home'. These statements reveal how the dynamics of address and response built into social justice testimonials bind the calculable with the incalculable, since the mothers present this testimony to an audience from whom they ask direct assistance.

Masik's images do not seem to ask the viewer to relate to the subject and as a result they fail to elicit compassion. What they succeed at is shocking the viewer into, hopefully, positive action to ending femicide in Canada. The women in the paintings become martyrs, as if their individual deaths contribute to the ending of femicide. This reading is in keeping with Masik's intention to "paint in art historical references"⁸⁰ as the style imitates Renaissance era Catholic martyr paintings seen in ecclesiastical settings or more specifically, the appropriation of these images by female and feminist artists to depict their own suffering by men. An example of this can be seen in Artemisia Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait as a Female Martyr* (1615).

Images including paintings of trauma are an encounter with the subject at hand, and this encounter is central to the notion of bearing witness. As discussed earlier, images cannot present absolute truth, but depict the point of view of the image-maker. As such, the viewer does not bear witness to the actual event (the murder of the women) but to the telling of these women's stories (through Masik's voice). "The act of bearing witness is not the communication of a truth that is already known, but its actual production through

⁸⁰ Pamela Masik, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, October 16, 2010.

this performative act. In this process, the listener becomes a witness to the witness, not only facilitating the very possibility of testimony, but also subsequently, sharing its burden” (Guerin and Halas 2007, 11). That is to say, it is Masik who acts as witness, not to the actual murders (as she too references images) but to the media testimony of the violence.

In Compassion Fatigue: How The Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death, Susan Moeller reminds the reader that we have become desensitized to violence in the media and that these outlets must find increasingly enticing ways to present us with this news. At the same time, disasters must compete with each other to get prime time news slots and therefore public support. The result is compassion fatigue – which tempts journalists to find “ever more sensational tidbits in stories to retain the attention of their audience” (Moeller 1999, 2). When the public develops compassion fatigue and no longer responds to images of violence and suffering “our understanding of a crisis is weakened, diluted and distorted” (Moeller 1999, 35). Femicide of Native women has never been an alluring subject for news agencies, when compared with larger scale disasters. Journalists who have written about the issue have chosen to sensationalize the issue by highlighting the gruesome ways they died and focusing on the difficult pasts of some of the victims as representative of all the cases. The viewer of Masik's work bears witness to the ethical dilemma of the artist to provide a graphic account of the end of life to force remembrance and action. To quote the well-known adage, a picture is worth a thousand words, and with Masik’s paintings the words Masik makes visible are those of the media and not the victims and their families. Regardless, Masik’s work contributes in its own way to public knowledge about the disappearances and this is an important accomplishment.

Conclusion:

So many writers and artists think it is enough to name the women who were killed, as if this will prevent it from happening again and to absolve them/us of the guilt of having not prevented it in the first place. It is not enough to name without knowing. Naming is a powerful first step, an important move towards acknowledgement of the victim. But it is not enough to only name. Until we take seriously Inga Muscio's call for "cunt-love", (sexual) violence against women will still be a living problem.

Kovacic's work has been compared to that of Vancouver painter Pamela Masik.⁸¹ In the catalogue for *A Roomful of Missing Women*, George Harris references Masik's paintings, calling them "cinematic in scale."⁸² But where Kovacic paints to bring back a sense of humaneness to her subject, to present them as loved and respected equals, Masik's work is to bring "the Missing Women to us and wraps us in the violence."⁸³ Kovacic paints the lives lost, Masik is painting, according to Mia Johnson "to make us see their faces and hear their voices, to force us to face the passion, anger and despair in lives and deaths like these."⁸⁴ Masik and Kovacic began their projects because of a need to personally confront the subject matter and to help to raise awareness. Where Masik was met with public support (her work was shown as part of the Olympic activities, winter 2010 and at the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, spring 2011) she has not received support from the families and friends of the missing women. Kovacic, who

⁸¹ Alexandra Gill's January 11, 2007 article "With the first-degree murder trial of Robert Pickton set to open soon, three B.C. artists memorialize the missing women as individuals." In the Globe and Mail, for example.

⁸² Betty Kovacic, Broek Bosma, George Harris and Deborah Poff, "A Roomful of Missing Women: Artwork and Writing by Betty Kovacic." Prince George: Two Rivers Gallery, 2007.

⁸³ Mia Johnson. "The Forgotten: About the Exhibition" Mia Johnson Writing. http://www.miajohnsonwriting.com/?page_id=6

⁸⁴ Mia Johnson. "The Forgotten: About the Exhibition" Mia Johnson Writing. http://www.miajohnsonwriting.com/?page_id=6

began her project as a personal one that she then shared with the families of victims, has had considerably less public support (the work has barely toured) but the families of the victims have given positive feedback.

Neither Masik nor Kovacic worked with the family as the target audience, attempting instead to raise awareness levels in outside communities. Anderson worked directly with the families and affected communities, from the project's inception, to create a personalized performance for healing and reconciliation. Anderson's work provided the artist and community with the type of remembering most suited for them. The healing rituals of Anderson's performances present an artist's placement of herself in the shoes of the victim, suggesting that she herself can just as easily become victim.

The works discussed in this thesis all aimed to raise awareness and each artist I spoke with also presented their work as a marker for change in regards to how we react to femicide of Native women. Each artist spoke of their attempt to create compassion for the subject. Certainly in the portraits of Kovacic, seeing the faces of the missing women elicits empathy in the viewer.

Where Amnesty International and the United Nations recognize five hundred missing Aboriginal women, the numbers are probably in reality much higher. It is perhaps easy to ignore news reports that present us with statistics of murder, but it is much harder to ignore the faces of the individuals present in the works of art discussed here. Writing about these works, meeting community activists engaged in the struggle to raise awareness and hearing the stories of hope from families of the victims has been an incredibly powerful experience for me. In the two years since I began the research for this

project I have been able to tell dozens of people about these cases, myself raising the level of awareness. But even in that short time, many more young women have gone missing and their cases have not been investigated thoroughly, nor have they received justice. My hope in writing this is to call attention to the situation through the works of the artists presented, and that the work inspires people to prevent new cases of femicide.

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Pamela Masik, interview by author, Vancouver, BC, October 16, 2010.

FIGURES



Figure 1 *Claudette Osborne Missing Poster*
Unknown
2009
Photograph



Figure 2 *The Profession of Pain*
Zoe Pawlak
2006
Installation view



Figure 3 *Heroines*
Lincoln Clarkes
2001
Photographic print

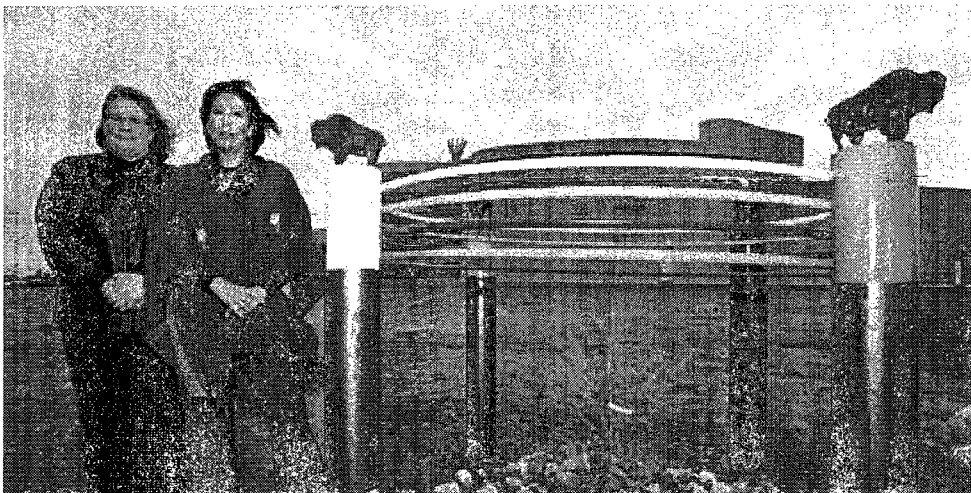


Figure 4 *Bison Sentinel*
Adrian Stimson
2007
Bronze, tree



Figure 5 *Vigil*
Rebecca Belmore
2002
Video still

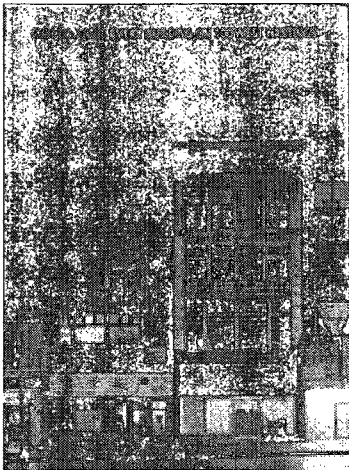
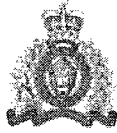


Figure 6 *Every Building on 100 West Hastings*
Stan Douglas
2002
Photograph



Figure 7 *Marker of Change*
Beth Alber
1997
Granite



MISSING WOMEN TASK FORCE
MISSING WOMEN
VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA



 Sheri AIKAWA Last Seen: Jan 1987	 Amber AIKAWA Last Seen: Aug 2008	 Sharon AIKAWA Last Seen: Feb 2009	 Elaine ALLENHAM Last Seen: Nov 1988	 Angela ARSENIAULT Last Seen: Aug 1994	 Shirley BAKER Last Seen: Jan 1993	 Nancy BECK Last Seen: Sep 2001	 Yvonne BRIEN Last Seen: Mar 2001	 Susan BRENNAN Last Seen: Feb 1993
 Barbara BOTTOMELEY Last Seen: Apr 2009	 Barbara BRENNAN Last Seen: Jul 2009	 Nancy CLARK Last Seen: Aug 1997	 Shirley CRAWFORD Last Seen: Oct 1994	 Marlene CRAWFORD Last Seen: Nov 2009	 Laura CREE Last Seen: Nov 2009	 Heidi CRAWFORD Last Seen: Apr 2009	 Sherry DONAHUE Last Seen: July 1998	 Sherry DUFF Last Seen: May 2009
 Elaine EMSIE Last Seen: 1994	 Marie EGAN Last Seen: Jul 1990	 Lisa EGAN Last Seen: Dec 2009	 Libby FERGUSON Last Seen: Feb 2009	 Sylvia FISHER Last Seen: Sep 1993	 Heidi FISHER Last Seen: Sep 1993	 Amber GAUDIN Last Seen: Sep 2009	 Yvonne GONZALEZ Last Seen: Mar 1990	 Angela GINO Last Seen: Jan 1993
 Michelle GINNERY Last Seen: Jan 1998	 Heidi HALL Last Seen: Jul 2009	 Helen HALMSTAD Last Seen: Dec 2009	 Kelly HARDY Last Seen: Jul 1991	 Julie HENRY Last Seen: Jan 1997	 Joanne HELYS Last Seen: Sep 2009	 Sherry HAYS Last Seen: Apr 2009	 Heidi HARRIES Last Seen: Dec 2009	 Heidi HARRIES Last Seen: Dec 2009
 Yvonne HOGG Last Seen: 1994	 Heidi HOGG Last Seen: 2009	 Catherine JOHNSON Last Seen: Sep 1995	 Sherry JOHNSON Last Seen: Sep 2009	 Marie JOHNSON Last Seen: Dec 1997	 Yvonne KANE Last Seen: Jan 1997	 Richard Keith LYLE Last Seen: Apr 1997	 Laura MAIR Last Seen: Aug 1997	 Catherine MCDOWELL Last Seen: Sep 2009
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 Frances YOUNG Last Seen: Apr 1989	 Julie YOUNG Last Seen: Oct 2009							

\$100,000 REWARD

The Ministry of Attorney General and the Vancouver Police Board have authorized a reward of up to \$100,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for the unlawful confinement, kidnapping, or murder of any or all of the listed women, missing from the streets of Vancouver. Upon the arrest and conviction of a person or persons responsible for the unlawful confinement, kidnapping, or murder of any one or more of the women listed on this poster, a reward will be awarded by the Vancouver Police Board, in its sole discretion, and that decision is final, binding and not reviewable.

Only those people who come forward and volunteer information which is reviewed by the Vancouver Police Department or the Missing Women Task Force on or before December 31, 2007 will be eligible to receive a reward.

Any persons having information regarding the unlawful confinement, kidnapping or murder of any of the missing women listed on this poster are requested to communicate that information immediately to the Vancouver Police Department, Missing Persons Unit or the Missing Women Task Force.

Charges have been laid

IF YOU HAVE INFORMATION ON ANY OF THE ABOVE WOMEN AND HAVE NOT YET SPOKEN TO POLICE, PLEASE CALL THE MISSING WOMEN TASK FORCE TIP LINE:

1 877 687 3377

Figure 8 Missing Women Task Force Poster 2009 edition
 Vancouver Missing Women Task Force
 2009
 Photograph



Figure 9 *Helen Betty Osborne*
Unknown
1971
Photograph



Figure 10 *Andrea Joesbury*
Betty Kovacic
2004
Oil on canvas

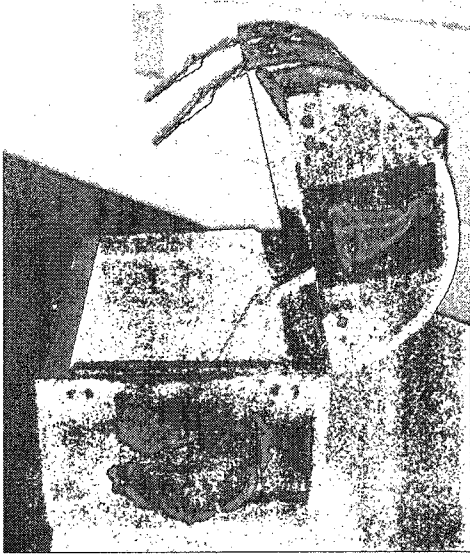


Figure 11 *Box*
Betty Kovacic
2004
Decoupage on wood



Figure 12 *A Roomful of Missing Women*
Betty Kovacic
2004
Mixed media

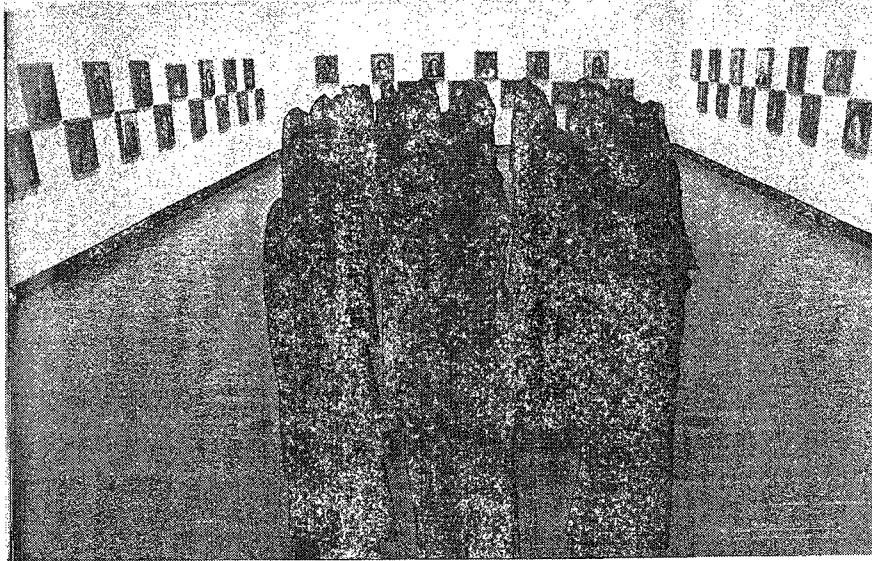


Figure 13 *A Roomful of Missing Women*
Betty Kovacic
2007
Exhibition view

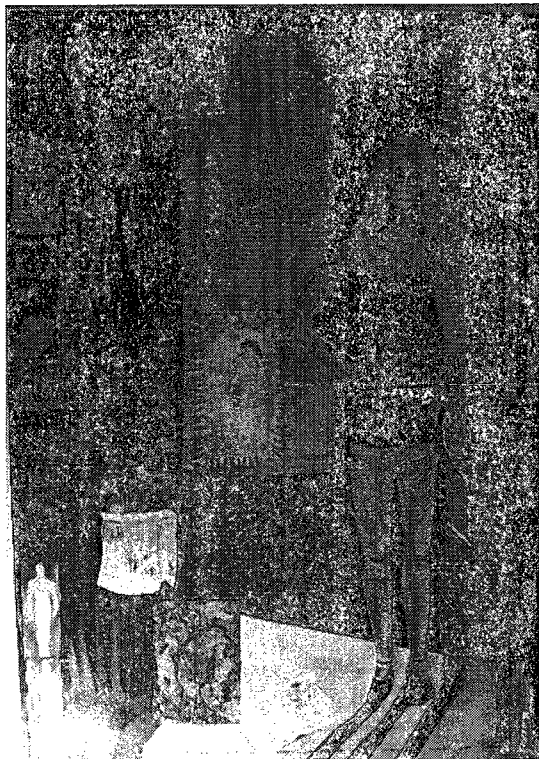


Figure 14 *The Snake Casts No Shadow*
Betty Kovacic
1997
Mixed Media

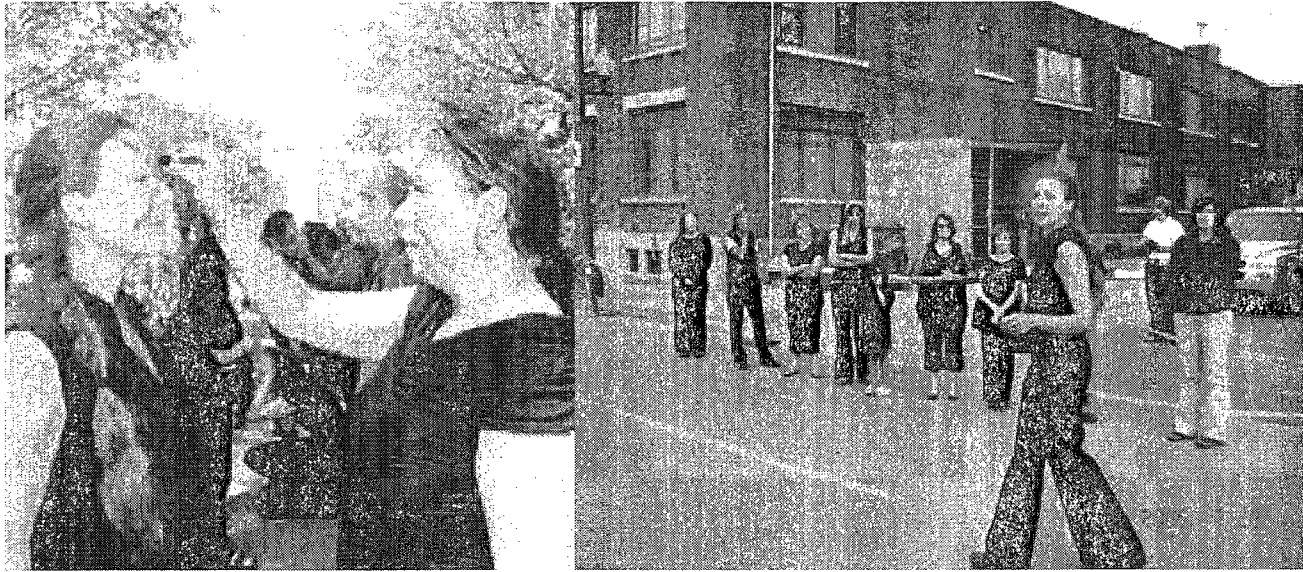


Figure 15 *ProjectX*

Dianne Anderson

2006

Photograph

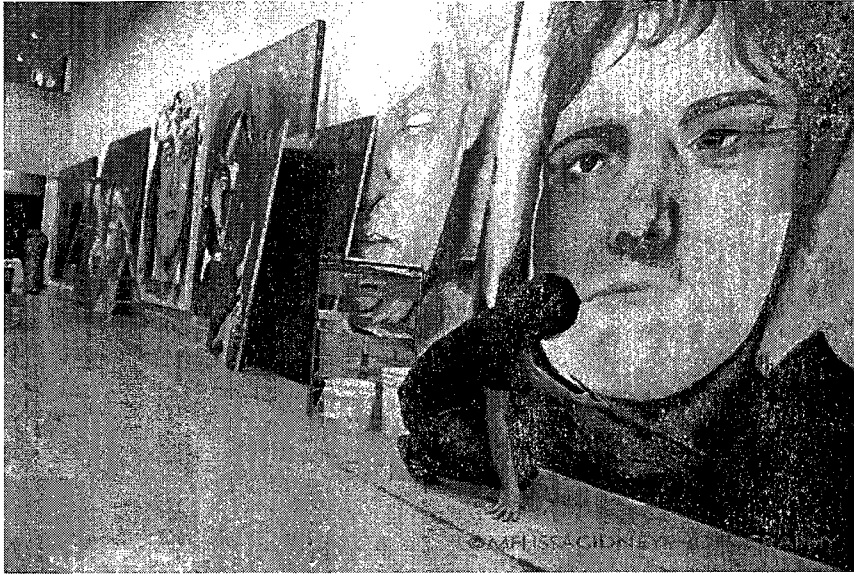


Figure 16 *The Forgotten*
Pamela Masik
2005
Mixed media



Figure 17 *The Forgotten*
Pamela Masik
2005
Mixed media



Figure 18 *The Forgotten*
Pamela Masik
2005
Mixed media



Figure 19 *The Forgotten*
Pamela Masik
2005
Mixed media