

SHAWN SYMS
(CAN)

KEEPING IT ARBOREAL: THE
RADICAL PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY OF
JAMIE ROSS

Text commissioned by Skol for the
exhibition *Apparition of the Wild*

The work of Jamie Ross undermines and destabilizes organized systems of human control over land, body and mind. *Apparition of the Wild* represents a multisensorial act of resistance to the dichotomizing frameworks of historical hegemony. With a potent combination of emotional veracity and ecstatic wisdom, this challenging and engaging exhibition promotes alternative ways of understanding our surroundings — and ourselves.

Together, these works provide a skilful and provocative synthesis of voices, spectacles, sounds, and imagery that are transtemporal, cross-cultural — and elsewhere most commonly segregated from one another. Intensely personal yet outwardly visionary, what manifests is a composite portrait of Omàmiwininì Anishinàbe Algonquin and Kanien'kehá:ka Mohawk territories and their multifarious inhabitants from an organic kaleidoscope of vantage points — human and otherwise.

Positivist knowledge and the documentary form are deconstructed in *Fallow La Friche* (2012). Nature's unstoppable imperative is regrowth, and queer uses for the forest occupy and defy arbitrary divides between public and private. Masks and ritualized attire assert the presence of the supernatural. Statistical information is contextualized as one element of a continuous present and a broader truth, and an egalitarian narrative emerges in which a range of beings oppose being shaped by state apparatuses.

Texts and voices overlap in a Cagèan aural soundscape: songs in Gaidhlig (Gaelic), First Nations tongues, sounds beyond language — an automobile motor, rumbles within a Cessna, flowing tree sap. French/English bilingualism

is acknowledged, but quickly exposed as an oversimplification. Facts and figures share space with music and poetry of origins before, during and after colonization. Subverting expected modes of discourse, the work thus resembles a crúiscín lán — a small jug brimming full — with emotions, meanings and subjectivities.

In *Fallow La Friche* and *Two to a Blanket, Feet to the Fire* (2012), walking, sitting, talking, dancing, laughing and fucking are all presented as meaningful and generative activities. Retracing an Ontario Colonization Road, Ross illuminates continuities between 19th-century homosociality between loggers and the explicitly homoerotic, communitarian ethos of queer pagans reanimating the same forest landscape today.

As a representation of resistance to rules of social and sexual order past and present, his vision of nude men penetrating one another on unceded land complicates our understandings of industry, freedom and self-determination. In this way, the anus becomes a symbol of beautiful, fruitful defiance, and a route away from colonization — of land, of the body, and of the mind.

Shawn Syms writes about art, sex, drugs and queers. His work has appeared in over 50 publications including *The Rumpus*, *C Magazine*, *Fuse*, *subTerrain*, *Poetry is Dead* and *The Journey Prize Stories 21* (McClelland & Stewart).

JAMIE ROSS
(MTL)

APPARITION OF THE WILD

November 30 – December 15, 2012
video installation



An installation comprised of four videos including *Two to a Blanket*, *Feet to the Fire*, and *Fallow La Friche*, accompanied by a book of the same name published by *False Flesh Press* and *Vidéographe*.

Apparition of the Wild is a time-based and written exploration of the return of forests to Eastern Ontario. We descend over a landscape weary from centuries of invasion, territorial expropriation, from deforestation. Ross' camera and pen guide us along an uncommon line of sight into the new forest, striking a tender balance between documenting and dreaming the (re) emergent cultures of the area by giving voice to its people, animate and inanimate. Songs and speech in the polyphonic throng of local tongues brings the continued reality of these cultural communities to the fore. Through the flow of sap, running of airplane and car motors, audio artifacts give agency to non-humans.

Historical actions, speech and narrative are crucial to this understanding of contemporary place. Ross takes heavily from archival recordings, particularly of the timber industry which so radically transformed the landscape and the homosocial spaces of its labouring men. So too have generations of contemporary queer men gathered in sanctuary among the trees, creating powerful magical communities of creative resistance.

The video works approach the emergent history of the rural landscape with a focus on resurgence following collapse, a theme which will serve as oracular as industrialized societies the world over develop resources to the breaking point. Resurgence of indigenous sovereignty, of sustainable subsistence agriculture, and of the diverse forest communities themselves.

Jamie Ross was born in a little house on Pendrith Street a hot night in May, just north of Toronto's Christie Pits Park. That is the place where it began. Ross is a redheaded artist, filmmaker and writer. His writing has been anthologized and published in periodicals and zines; his award-winning film has screened on four continents. His work blurs the lines of fact and fiction in its exploration of history and preoccupation with societal projections into the future. Personal psychogeography and senses of place are abiding interests, central to his second written work, *Fallow La Friche*. The abandoned landscapes of his Eastern Ontario ancestry are perennial sources of inspiration and strength. Creating and documenting queer community based on a sincere engagement with magic, grafting himself onto the rich artistic traditions of his ancestors, cultural and biological, is fundamental. Jamie now lives in Montreal.

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