

EVENTS

PUBLIC TALK BY IMAN ISSA AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

Wednesday 31 October, 8 PM
Iman Issa in conversation with Sarah Robayo Sheridan
2012-13 Art Now! Speaker Series at Western University
Room 100, John Labatt Visual Art Centre
Free Admission/All Welcome

OPENING RECEPTION / TOUR WITH THE ARTISTS IMAN ISSA AND KERRI REID

Friday 2 November, 7 PM
Join exhibiting artists Kerri Reid and Iman Issa in a walk-through of their respective exhibitions beginning at 7 PM, to be followed by the opening reception in celebration of their solo exhibitions.

RESOURCE GROUP FOR RECENT GRADS

POLYCEPHALY: ART, FUNDING AND MYTHOLOGY

Peter Kingstone, Acting Visual and Media Arts Officer at the Toronto Arts Council
Thursday 8 November, 6 PM
Bringing forward ideas central to his artistic practice, this talk will explore the intersections between art, funding and mythology.

APPLYING TO INTERNATIONAL GRANTS

Cindy Blažević and Pascal Paquette
Thursday, November 29, 6 PM
Using their large-scale project from 2007 as a model, artists Cindy Blažević and Pascal Paquette share the success of their approach to international projects and funding, while offering food for thought into related means of applying for international grants, scholarships and funds.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SHORT-TERM RESIDENCY FOR FEATURED ARTIST KERRI REID

27 October–9 November 2012
Mercer Union is pleased to acknowledge the support of Partisan Studios for accommodation for the artist during her stay in Toronto. Kerri Reid is available as a visiting lecturer during her stay. If you would like her to host her in your classroom, please contact Sarah Robayo Sheridan at sarah@mercerunion.org to arrange a visit.



Mercer Union, A Centre for Contemporary Art

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SONIC PRINT CA



Material for a sculpture recalling the destruction of a prominent public monument in the name of national resistance

Iman Issa, *Material* for a sculpture recalling the destruction of a prominent public monument in the name of national resistance, 2010. Mahogany sculpture with black tassel, 49 x 49 x 142 cm pedestal, vinyl wall text. From the series *Material* (2010-2011).

BIO

Iman Issa is an artist living and working in Cairo and New York. Recent solo and group exhibitions include: *The Ungovernables*, New Museum, New York (2012); *Seeing is Believing*, KW Institute of Contemporary Art, Berlin (2011); *Material*, Rodeo, Istanbul (2011); *Short Stories*, SculptureCenter, New York (2011); and *Propaganda by Monuments*, Contemporary Image Collective, Cairo (2011). Her video work has been screened at several venues including Transmediale, Berlin; Tate Modern, London; Spacex, Exeter; Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool; and Bidoun Artists Cinema, Art Dubai, Dubai.

Kerri Reid is a visual artist originally from Vancouver, BC. She has exhibited her work both nationally and internationally, and has participated in residencies in Vermont, Iceland, Banff, Dawson City, and Saskatchewan. She is currently living in the small rural community of Bruno, Saskatchewan, (population 600), where she works as a distance-education instructor through the University of Guelph while also co-directing (with Tyler Brett) The Bruno Arts Bank, a small music venue/artist residency/coffee shop/art gallery/mini-museum/music and bookshop. Reid also plays bass for The Department, with recent performances in Reykjavik, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, at the Bruno Cherry Festival, and at the Bruno Friendship Centre for Seniors Appreciation Day.

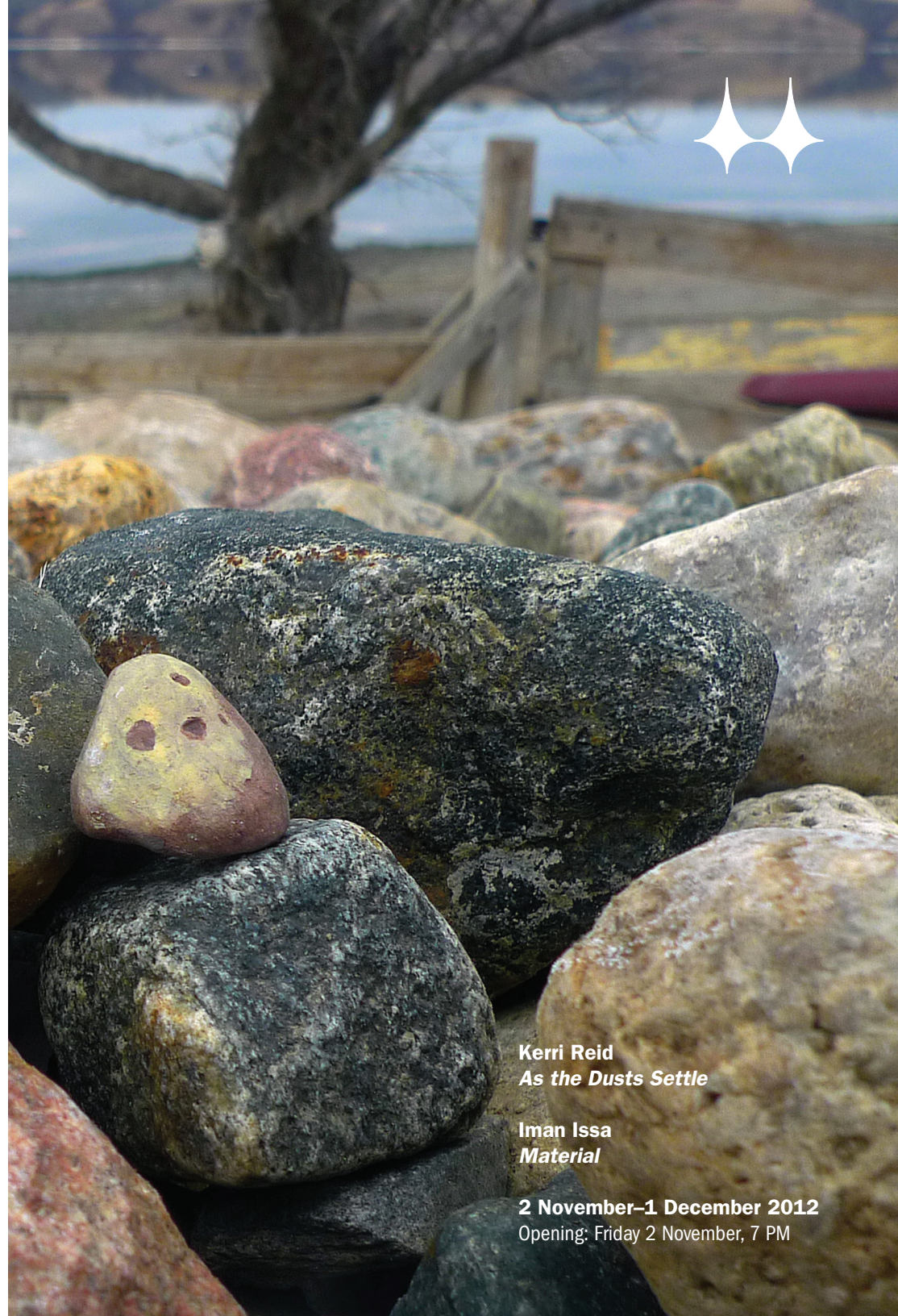
Natalie Musteata is a Ph.D. student in Art History at The Graduate Center, CUNY. She is an adjunct lecturer at Parsons, The New School, where she teaches *Performance and Participation in the 20th Century*. In 2012, Musteata curated *UNREST: Revolt against Reason*, an exhibition exploring the intersection of art and politics, at apexart in New York, and organized the panel discussion *How Can Art Affect Political Change?* for the Vera List Center for Art and Politics. In February 2013, she will present her most recent essay, "Performing Dissent: The Rhetoric of Opposition in Reenactment Performance," at the CAA Annual Conference.

Sarah Robayo Sheridan is Director of Exhibitions and Publications at Mercer Union.



Kerri Reid, *Souvenirs (California)*, 2012. Left: rocks found in California; right: copies of rocks found in California, stoneware with underglazes and acrylic paint.

Cover image: Kerri Reid, *Souvenir Return (Manitou Beach, SK)*, 2012. Stoneware replica of a rock found in Saskatchewan, deposited in the landscape where the original rock was found.



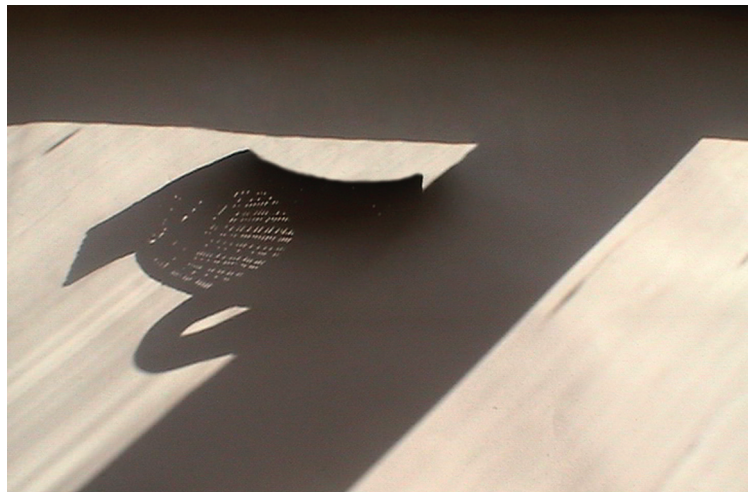
Kerri Reid
As the Dusts Settle

Iman Issa
Material

2 November–1 December 2012
Opening: Friday 2 November, 7 PM



Kerri Reid, *Sawdust Pile (Vermont)*, 2008. Pen on paper.



Kerri Reid, *Wicker Goose Film Still (from The End of the World)*, 2011. Time lapse video.

Front Gallery

Kerri Reid: *As the Dusts Settle*

Kerri Reid’s formal investigations often take the form of salvage, repair and restitution of found objects. She is well known for her carefully crafted surrogates: whether a piece of broken crockery multiplied into an uncanny series, or the message from a single fortune cookie painstakingly copied three hundred times in ballpoint pen on paper strips. Though the artist’s cunning would seem to trump chance and defy the infinite permutations of nature, second inspection of her copies always reveals her hand at work. This form of humanistic repetition manages to evade strict homogeneity and places her in an interesting lineage with artists like Agnes Martin and Sol LeWitt whose love of the grid is made all the more poignant by the evidence of touch. There is a deep satisfaction to be derived from the craft of Reid’s work—whether her ceramic sculptures, her immaculately rendered drawings, or her more recent series of retouched time-lapse videos. This exhibition gathers works by Reid that relate to her fascination with the ephemeral trace of dust, debris and shadow. Through varied processes, the artist’s negotiations of real and synthetic objects raise intriguing metaphysical paradoxes.

Reid’s series *Dust and Debris: Piles and Drawings* was initiated during a residency at the Vermont Studio Centre in the winter of 2008 where she began to observe and document the forms of sawdust piles accumulated in her studio. Reid salvaged the original piles and then used the still-life drawings to aid her in reinstating the dust to its original chance configuration. She has carried on this method of working at different sites, expanding the exercise to include sweeping up after a previous artist’s exhibition (Raphaëlle de Groot’s *The Burden of Objects* at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery) and collecting dust samples in other locales. Bruce Nauman once moved around piles of flour in the studio, photographing them to resemble mountain ranges and calling the exercise *Flour Arrangements* (1967). Reid’s drawings likewise collapse micro and macro scale through their evocation of star maps and primal landscapes. Lately, she has become fascinated with the visual documentation that was returned by the NASA Stardust Mission, the aim of which was to collect cometary dust grains for study on earth. The interpretation of the data relies on volunteers scouring the material for glimpses of this precious cosmic dust. Kerri Reid is just such a volunteer “duster,” and this experience has led her into new territory and techniques including using a brush dipped in graphite dust to draw an impact crater and two interstellar dust particle images derived from the research data returned by the Stardust Mission.

Reid’s dust sensitivity has only grown since her recent relocation to Bruno, Saskatchewan, where she continues site-specific research developed in places like Dawson City, Banff, California and Iceland, to reveal aspects of her newfound prairie locale. Knowing Reid’s keen interest in particulate matter, it is not surprising that the “dust bowl” landscape inspires her. The exhibition at Mercer Union derives its title, *When the Dusts Settle*, from a book on the genealogy of the Dust family who migrated to Saskatchewan from Germany. Reid has produced two drawings of Dust family tombs from the local cemetery, based on surface rubbings from which she made drawings using the same technique as for the interstellar slide drawings. In the case of one of the tombs, the stone has eroded so much that the name “Dust” is barely

discernible. A coincidental overlap of a family’s history with natural features of prairie lands is emblematic of Reid’s concern for personal experience as it relates to landscape.

In recent years, Reid’s focus has been directed towards measuring her relationship to physical features of the natural landscape. During a residency in Iceland, she became interested in lava stones. Tourists are often compelled to collect these as mementos, but one superstition holds that this theft from the land is punishable by bad luck. There are examples of traveller guilt resulting in attempts to return stolen stones via the Icelandic postal service in hopes of lifting the curse. To make right her own removal, Reid has come up with a system of handcrafted replicas that will be systematically replaced as she returns to these sites. The displacement and renewal reinvent Reid’s *Souvenirs* as a form of active offering to and bond with a place. More discrete than dramatic works of land art, her human interference is nevertheless charted. Finding one of Reid’s *Souvenirs* in situ is only as probable as discovering two identical snowflakes in a lifetime, yet in the infinitely improbable chance that an archeologist or geologist happens upon one of her decoys, the question of the object’s origin is sure to confound. The depositing process marks Reid’s transit. One can think of the Hansel and Gretel laying bread crumbs to trace a safe path home but, rather than the ephemeral material of bread, Reid’s use of stones signifies a more permanent trace, pointing to the expansive time scale of the universe. The laying of stones is also a gesture shared with Jewish mourning rites—at the anniversary of a death, stones are placed at the grave as a sign of respect and to communicate that a visit has taken place. Reid’s replacement of stones also seems to bear a memorializing function, yet the ritual is less visible as the replacement stones blend into their surrounds. When she exhibits the work, it is a pronouncement of the gesture but when placing the stone at the site it is a private and effacing ritual. She leaves her own offering as a way of remembering and renewing her connection to the places that have marked her.

It may seem a departure to find Reid working in the medium of video for the series, *The End of the World*, however a meticulous drawing process is also in play in these six video loops. For each, she captured time-lapse footage of the shadows cast by found objects—a rusty nail, a broken plate, a bent spoon, a broken ashtray, a broken wicker goose basket, and a broken snowshoe—and then worked frame-by-frame to separate the shadow from its source object. These orphaned shadows then gain life of their own and in the process they transition from immaterial ghosts into objects in their own right. In that process is evident Reid’s careful concern for the preservation of overlooked and discarded elements as subjects worthy of closer attention.

—Sarah Robayo Sheridan



Iman Issa, *Material for a sculpture proposed as an alternative to a monument that has become an embarrassment to its people*, 2010. Two light bulbs, 150 x 50 x 120 cm plywood structure, vinyl wall text, light bulbs synced in a loop in which one lights up while the other one slowly fades. From the series *Material* (2010-2011).

Back Gallery

Iman Issa: *Material*

Positioned within the interstices of physical reality and personal memory, the diverse practice of Egyptian artist Iman Issa continuously comes back to a critical question: “How does one visually evoke, communicate or signify one’s personal relationship to familiar places, events, and figures?” This question is born of Issa’s profound skepticism, or disbelief in, the pragmatist function of words and images to represent the complex makeup of memory. In recent years, Issa has probed this question against the abstracting background and symbolic language of monuments and memorials.

Throughout the 20th century, the visual rhetoric of official monuments—edifices intended to act as mnemonic and commemorative markers—has repeatedly been put to the test. In 1937, the architectural historian Lewis Mumford excoriated the grand, “hollow” monuments of the past. Pronouncing “the death of the monument,” he argued that the classic civilizations of the world have been oriented towards death and fixity, which explains why the notion of a modern monument is simply a contradiction in terms. Likewise, in an influential 1943 manifesto, “Nine Points on Monumentality,” the architect Josep Lluís Sert, the painter Fernand Léger, and the architectural critic Siegfried Giedion decreed contemporary monuments “empty shells,” no longer capable of embodying the collective spirit of modern times. By the 1960s and ‘70s the rejection of staid heroic memorials took many forms: think of Barnett Newman’s *Broken Obelisk* (1963-69), an upended obelisk with a fractured shaft, dedicated to Martin Luther King, Jr. following his assassination in 1968; Claes Oldenburg’s first outdoor “disappearing” public monument, *Placid Civic Monument* (1967), also known as *The Hole*, which took the form of a conceptual performance behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, with a crew of grave diggers digging a 6 x 3 foot rectangular hole in the ground, then filling it back up; and Robert Smithson’s anti-monument *Spiral Jetty* (1970), the artist’s renowned exercise in entropy—an action that describes an irreversible trend toward disorder and chaos, resulting in the obsolescence of the monument. Issa’s series *Material* (2010–11) is a 21st century update of this conceptual group of works. In presenting not “anti,” but rather “counter-monumental” proposals, maquettes, and alternative “materials,” she offers an antithesis to the failed doctrine of official monuments.

At Mercer Union, four of the ten works that comprise Issa’s *Material* are on view. Each display refers to an existing monument that Issa intimately knows from her native city of Cairo. Returning to the question of how to evoke one’s close knowledge of a monument, Issa gradually strips the original of its extraneous features (the fixed, petrified image of the monument). She thus begins with a blank slate, slowly building up each display until it gains a language of its own, reactivating memory. In one such example, two white spherical lamps positioned on opposite sides of a slender wooden table take turns illuminating. As one lights up, the other dies down. The title, *Material for a sculpture proposed as an alternative to a monument that has become an embarrassment to its people* (2010), is presented as vinyl text on an adjacent wall. Functioning as descriptors, Issa’s long instructive titles are integral to each display, alluding to their original referents without revealing specifics. Distracting details are expunged, allowing for a renewed relationship between viewer and monument.



Iman Issa, *Material for a sculpture commemorating the life of a soldier who died defending his nation against intruding enemies*, 2010. Four painted wooden sculptures, 235 x 47 x 41 cm plinth, 56 x 37 x 2 cm shelf, blank book with four inserts, vinyl wall text. From the series *Material* (2010-2011).

In another display, *Material for a sculpture commemorating the life of a soldier who died defending his nation against intruding enemies* (2010), four painted wooden geometric structures are arranged on a low white plinth: the red frame of a hollow cube, a blue diagonal slat attached to a horizontal one, three green oval shapes ordered by size, and a black sphere. An open book, entirely blank aside from four pages colored to correspond to the respective hues of the objects, is displayed on a nearby shelf. According to Issa, the piece began with four sentences from the fictitious diary of a soldier: “It was a day of constant bombing;” “We lost many lives that day;” “We spent the day in the field preparing and practicing for an imminent battle;” and “We went out on a mission trying to infiltrate enemy lines.” From there, each structure and colour was devised to correspond to one of the four sentences. Instead of presenting the words themselves, Issa impels us to “read” the forms. How, and what do they communicate?

Conceived prior to Egypt’s uprising and removal of autocrat Hosni Mubarak, the sculptures stem from a moment when images, words, and thus monuments were emptied of their meaning, and the link between signifier and signified became a “ground zero.” In her text “When Fox Becomes Polar Bear,” published in the catalogue for the New Museum exhibition *The Ungovernables*, Issa describes such a situation. In the fall of 2010 a friend sent her a page from an Egyptian textbook in which the image of a polar bear was accompanied by the caption “Fox.” This absurd mismatch was more than just a careless mistake; it was, says Issa, “a material testament to a collective lack of belief in appearances.” When all forms have been instrumentalized, co-opted, and leveraged by the status quo, resulting in a widespread distrust of visual and verbal language, a fox might as well look like a polar bear. However, Issa does not forsake representation as defunct and valueless. Rather, she notes, it is “now, and only now,” once forms have lost their “voice” and “utility,” that we can begin to freshly reengage with such forms and their constituent parts. She asks, “Could it be that as the shapes, colors, and sounds of the statue, political poster, historical tale, and national anthem become the property of no one, they could similarly become the property of everyone?”

Although *Material* sprung from a place of doubt, a deep uncertainty in the communicative potential of monuments and memorials, it ultimately presents an altered, yet revitalized trust in commemorative agency. I use here the term “counter-monument”—first introduced by cultural historian James E. Young in 1992 to describe a paradigmatic shift in the language of holocaust memorials—because Issa’s displays signal just that, a 180° shift, an about-face. Instead of abandoning the monuments’ compromised forms altogether, Issa saturates them with the personal, the everyday, and the imagined. Young has suggested that the perfect memorial is perhaps no memorial at all, but simply the debate surrounding this subject. The debate brought on by Issa’s *Material* underscores the potential of counter-monuments to recall the past through a production of it. A form in construction, in process, a “material,” as she calls it, has a greater capacity to actualize civic and private memory than the timeless physical structure official monuments have hitherto inadequately attempted to create.

—Natalie Musteata