

Proposal for Art Gallery of Peterborough, Canadian Canoe Museum, Ottawa Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Kelowna: “Pine: the Trudeau Project”

“Pine: the Trudeau Project” is an environmental art project combining sculpture, printmaking, painting, and performance. It is not so much about Trudeau as a person, as it is about the Trudeau era, and the changes that have taken place in the country in the past generation, particularly in relation to national vision, and climate change. During the Trudeau era Canada had a strong national vision and sense of a future. Today with climate change we are uncertain as to what the future will hold, and live in an era not of vision but anxiety. The systems we have created are self-propelling, yet unsustainable.

In previous work I began taking old wooden boats apart and reconfiguring them like organisms to tell stories related to history and mythology and how the continent was originally traveled. One piece, “Ark”, a 30’ sandblasted and gutted mahogany boat, traveled from Georgian Bay in Ontario to show under the Manhattan Bridge in Brooklyn, as a symbolic gesture related to U.S./Canadian environmental issues. This piece is an environmental art analogue to Bill Reid’s Haida Gwaii and also relates to the British artist Simon Starling’s ShedBoatShed, and Magdalena Abakanowicz’ hollow figures. A related commission of forms combining aquatic animal and boat skeletons is along a salmon river in Kelowna B.C. Toronto Temporary Projects approved an installation of altered boat sculptures beneath the Gardiner Expressway in Toronto near Fort York (WaterLine)—this project is pending funding. Community art projects have occurred in Edmonton, Alberta, and Peterborough, Ontario. Recently I have begun retrofitting a barn/studio—itself an overturned ark-- as a developing environmental art centre in Peterborough County near Cordova Mines.

“Pine: the Trudeau Project” involves recent work with a moldmaking process to create pieces from the Canadian Shield. Using vulcanized latex—rubber tree sap, from Burma—and layers of gauze I am creating “skins” from the rock faces, old boats, trees, and abandoned farmhouses in northeastern Ontario. These skins are like translucent tapestries when light shines through them and image the earth’s warming and the effects of climate change. They symbolically connect our bodies, to the land. They reference First Nations culture as well, because they are like large wampum belts made from the land, which the First Nations used as legal documents for agreements between nations. Materials become embedded between the layers, by chance and intention: insects, leaves, bits of shale or bark, porcupine quills, dried plant stalks—like embedded drawings, fossils in amber. This work is an extension of the Canadian landscape painting tradition but is about impressions, not markmaking.

For this project I would canoe into an old growth pine forest in Ontario, possibly in Temagami, wearing a coat reminiscent of Trudeau’s buckskin jacket, made from a pine tree skin. 80% of the pines in B.C. may die as a result of climate change; most of the old growth forest in Ontario is gone. The canoes used in the project would be sculptures as they would be vintage canoes, with holes in them, symbolizing environmental issues, an

aging generation, aging country, half gone. They would be covered on the outside with transparent fiberglass resin so that the water and light would show through, but they would float. In this way Trudeau's focus on Canada and water—"trou d'eau" meaning, "water-hole"--would be highlighted.

In the old growth grove I would make "tree skins" on the pines, on site, and peel them partly off like skins, dresses, banners, bandages, letting the sun light and dry them. These pieces also relate to the Dead Sea Scrolls as the trees are used as live scrolls, but it is not human writing.

The process would be video documented and at the end the pieces would be removed from the trees and carried out just as furs once were, to become an exhibition encouraging positive action regarding climate change.

The American artist Bob Braine does projects with canoes related to this, but it has not been done in Canada, nor with the latex process in the landscape that I am using. One project involved gathering trash in NYC harbour, weaving it into a crude vessel and covering it with resin, and navigating the NYC shoreline. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's landscape works, and Andy Goldsworthy, are other influences.

Thank you for looking at the project. I have a related proposal with the Canadian Embassy in Japan (called "Shield Kimono"), and would like to do projects in other Embassies combining "Skins" made in Canada, with those made in the host country. With the G20 Summit, Copenhagen, and the increasing urgency surrounding climate change, the project is very timely.

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