

Michael :

Alors comme on a dit on va parler en anglais (Like we said we will speak in English). I'm going to speak in English and I'm going to show a slide show at the same time so that you get a sense of what it looked like so this was the first invitation card and this is it. Does it look okay?

Jeanne :

Great!

Michael :

Thanks.

Michael :

This was the first version at the basement of the Armenian center, or the Armenian Church in Laval and we had a video work, a book work and a series of digital drawings. And, this is a hybrid launch, we actually have some real humans in here which is very awkward. Yeah, I can't really show you guys the picture so well. Everybody's just coping.

And so it was shown over a weekend. These bazaars the church bazaars usually happen just over a weekend and get there seven in the morning set up like anybody else and wait there and sometimes people will come by curiously but obviously in these commercial settings, it's very unpredictable who will engage and videos definitely draw people in. There were some very interesting conversations about Cliff Eyland's drawings because they include his medical procedures as well as kind of cartoon characters. I won't really go over the works in these first versions. Well, I could just say that Cliff Eyland who passed away last year, was it 2020 I think it was 2020. He was ill for a long time. He had a lung transplant that bought him some more time. But he had to obviously take a bunch of medicine for anti rejection and meet in his usually his sort of signature was drawing on small index cards from libraries and he had to use something a bit larger in size and more flexible so he used his iPad he made drawings with using his camera as well as drawing programs and they turned out very psychedelic, and it's a series that remains and it's also here in the space shown once again.

And Mina Hedayat, who's also in this book, and I'll talk a little bit about the work when I'll get into the book, but she started off ...you can't really see the images here but she does a lot of portraiture. Just like on the book self portraiture and portraiture, domestic images and using recycled canvases from secondhand sources so I like actually showing for work in a bazaar is kind of like they're returning to their natural environment. But also showed a bunch of her earrings. She makes earrings. They're described in the in the book also. This was when it was shown in Charlotte town. It was outdoor. And there was a radio program eight hour radio program to go along with this one day art festival in Charlottetown that I couldn't go to so we just sent the works and I have no idea if it was a success or not. Anything because it's hard to tell from distance. But I can pretend that these people were all looking to waiting in line for the work anyway. This was the rough schedule of the radio broadcast. And by the end I was just just wiped out so it sounds like a great idea. But do you just try it if you think it's easy. So Mina's work, I'd say first of all that the book is hard to claim a book as an exhibition, it's been done a lot.

The most famous obviously, reference point and one that kind of was an obstacle for me was conceptual art, books as exhibitions by curators like Seth Siegelaub. And that's because the form of the book is so much tied to how the work appears. The work couldn't exist except in the form of that book. And just putting some photos of artwork in a book it doesn't necessarily claim that it's actually an exhibition it so I mean it's kind of a funny hang up because it is a little picky but at the same time when we're all like accessing art and events over zoom, then it's sort of an important claim to make that you're not just calling your zoom, event dinner or a party or an opening or something like that, because it's kind of we're kind of tired. So I wanted at least to have this belief that this was a real exhibition, and not just a book that's called an exhibition.

One thing I'll say about this substitution book as exhibition is in the project in general, translation was important, not really translation of French in English but of translation of between worlds, I guess. Translation is a metaphor for carrying things between worlds and also at like when we're talking about spirituality which this project was trying to focus on or expand, or just to kind of interpret, then how do artists work with that motif? Do they just celebrate it? Or do they critique it? Or is there something else going on? And to me, just actually, when I was at the table in the bazaars, the negotiating with people and trying to get some of these ideas across as well as certain of the artworks literally having to do with translation. That concept seemed to jump out at me it seemed useful because it's about interpreting and it's not an imperfect they also because there's no that literal translations usually don't make much sense. And also, why don't obviously didn't want to just kind of celebrate religion or artists working with religion, or spirituality. Because there's a lot of problems there too. I also, just side note, read something about conceptual art, which put it in the context of belief and belief structures...it was talking about these things called votive, ex votos, and where people show their miracle through photographs, or they used to be in in small kind of like, body parts or something to show what was healed on their body. And, and this, this historian talked about, how conceptual art has the same kind of like or not saying but it has it has a sort of similar way of asking for your belief in that something happened and it has some kind of address that is mystical in a way and there's several conceptual artists who also addressed that and called it out a little bit that is not just eliminating the material, but the material always is a part of the artwork. I felt like I could kind of get over this hang up of that I couldn't make this into a real exhibition, because it wasn't a conceptual art book. It wasn't orthodox or something.

But also Mina's work helped me to think of it in a different way because I asked, I was thinking for a while that would be great if Mina's same practice of wrapping her, you see the black and white image here, the frames are wrapped with her old jobs and other other textiles. You could look at it as having some aura of her belief, or you can see it as more what how she describes it as a protective gesture. And kind of making it something intimate and like pleasant, basically, these old frames that she uses, and I thought that would be a great way to house the book. At first I was just trying to figure out how can we actually put fabric around the book cover? And I just couldn't come up with an idea and a friend suggested, well, why don't you just make the frames for the book and then it all clicked because then the book is an artwork now it's not a it's not so it's like a it's an exhibition inside a book which is inside an artwork which then I feel like we've confused it enough that I can get out of the the kind of circular thinking of the art book that

can only be an exhibition because the things in it can only happen on that page. Anyway, let's go through some of these other things.

Actually, I asked the contributors for a few jokes also. So this is one that Mina submitted. The president of Iran calls Trump and tells him "I had a dream last night. New York was in ruins and the flame with Iranian flags flying above". Trump replies "Funny, I had a dream last night to Teheran beautiful and prosperous, happy people celebrating in the streets with big banners hanging everywhere". That's not a good trend. I'm not on Saturday Night Live. And "What did the banner say?" Ask the Iranian president. "I don't know" Trump answers, "I can't read Hebrew". So at the same time, the idea of substitution or translation evolved in a book as exhibition. I don't wanna read it.

I got another joke from her because I did this the wrong way. I was supposed to take a break with a joke. Go to Mina and tell another of the jokes. But I'll just say that her book, that her work, the book kind of become a doorway to an exhibition. We can think of it like that. And did another Iranian joke. A young persian man excitedly tells his mother he's fallen in love and then he's going to get married. He says "Just for fun Mom, I'm going to bring over three women and you try and guess which one I'm gonna marry". The Mother agrees. The next day, he brings three new beautiful women into the house and sits them down on the couch and they chat for a while. He then says, "Okay, mom guess which one I'm going to marry". She immediately replies "The one on the right". "That's amazing, mom. You're right. How did she know that?" The Persian mother replies "Because I don't like her".

I'm allowed to say this because I got the joke from her so I'm allowed to say that stuff.

Next, Michael Fernandes and Craig Leonard collaborated on a book called *Stretching Exercises* and I have copies in the middle of the floor. But here we had some pages scanned from the book and if you see this is the original "vinegar" and then someone wrote in Armenian, but in kind of English or Roman characters. This is actually the Armenian so their book is kind of like Zen, they're kind of small poems like, or whatever you call them. They are instructions. So there's a verb tense there that's kind of hard to translate even to understand in English. Some of them if you imagine that it's an instruction : "two houses. RV sex crash". As kind of imperatives. And "vinegar or clear heart". It gets quite abstract. And it gets even more difficult if you try to translate it. So since we were doing this project, I tried to translate them myself. So this one would have been "in and out" it was just "in an out". And I don't think that my translation perfectly captured to "out or to in" because that's how I understand what these instructions could be. So I worked with people who visited the table to try to come up with alternatives and, and also I, I'm not sure I was able to really communicate to some of the Armenian speakers what the problem was with my translation that I was trying to deal with, but we still got some nice script in there. And this is when the idea of translation really seemed to make sense. One of the ways that the table is used as a translation process.

I got a couple jokes from them. "Got to do some jokes for Eddy, let's work on it. This weekend. A comment walks into a bar. Bartender your history fuck off". That's you get it? "What did the

Scarab say to the bartender? Save me a stool. Why did you stop in the middle of the road? ran out of juice”

Jamie Ross did calligraphy under hypnosis, self hypnosis in the dead of winter to clear his mind during, I don't know which wave of the pandemic but it's a process that he learned from well self hypnosis he learned from his grandfather apparently. And I will just say about Jamie's work is that he has often posed and documented rituals that Rhian chant collectivity. Even if it's small groupings, he frequently works with the pagan community as he's some sort of Minister in that religion himself.

Also, in the next contribution to the exhibition, are the plates. There's one color plate in each book, but there's three different versions. You get a color image in the book. These are called prayer hands by Leah Cetera from New York. She's a sculptor and I know she's a fan of astrology, which is very, very popular among contemporary artists for some reason, I don't know why. But at least in social media, anyway. Her contribution is more of a photograph of a sculpture. Actually I made that photograph, but her sculpture is small, it's kind of like this kitch what we call tchotchkes. I don't know if Jeanne's little thing there is a tchotchke also. It's made of Bodega bags, mixed with wax and oil and melted into the mold. So like that was, she asked me an interesting question when I was describing this project, which was supposed to be shown in the bazaar, one of the bazaars in Montreal, and she asked me how this project respects the context of the bazaar goes and the basically you know, that the church community and also how it respects the artists and I guess that's an open question that maybe we can return to.

***This idea of translation maybe could be helpful or maybe it's, it goes down that path of where intervention becomes lack of sensitivity and sarcasm, I don't know. But this this work if you could see it as an offense to believers and Catholic fetishists of iconography and but maybe you can also see it as a reincorporation, or like a prayer for something so immense as the ocean. In the book it's called “A plastic prayer for the oceans”. So thinking about the effects of plastic use, how kind of sublime a problem that is and how only a divined entity could actually fix this problem for humans. I thought that could kind of address her own question about respect.

I've got Jeanne's joke. Jeanne said “the only joke I remember isn't a narrative. It doesn't have a punchline. Jean-Paul Satre said to do is to be and Frank Sinatra said dooby dooby doo”. She doesn't want anyone to know that she thinks it's funny. But we know.

And her work for the book is a text with drawings by her son called “Aphids and Immortality” and it's about Sigmund Freud's well, it it's about the interlocking lives of plants, bugs, viruses and humans in terms of the death drive, and maybe she can kind of elaborate on that better than I can.

And living and not necessarily being alive. So that's kind of interesting to think now. This was I think it was written well before the pandemic and when viruses became so trendy, but to think of something that is, is living and not alive. And, yeah, the kind of respect that she writes with for these entities for this form of living.

I got one more joke for you, people. “A government agent is responsible for finding an architect to build a tower so he brings three architects, a Chinese and American and an Iranian. The

Chinese architect says I charged \$3,000,000. 1.5 million for material 1 million for workers and point five as my salary. He goes to the next one. The American architect says I charge 6 million, 3 million for materials, 2 million for workers and 1 million as my salary. Finally he asked the Iranian. Iranian architect says I charge 9 million. The agent asks surprisingly, "how come?" The Iranian replies "You take 3 million, I take 3 million and we pay 3 million to the Chinese to build the tower".

Okay, when I first discovered Pak Sheung Chuen's work, I thought (and I recommend you look into his other work) I thought that it looked very similar to conceptual art, and that it was a comment on kind of classic conceptual art, where it's very photographic in terms of documentation that the act and the the outcomes are very simple materials and but the more I learned I had to abandon that idea. I worked for a gallery in Beijing and he was one of the artists represented by them. He would kind of document himself in terms of the city in relation to the city. So for example, how far he could walk and under a stairway before hitting his head on the bottom of it or standing outside a building until all the lights were turned off in an apartment building and small things like that. Like filling up an apartment with bags of his own air in plastic bags. And for his contribution here is the multi year work that he did called "Nightmare wallpaper".

Those are those kinds of works, they're more measuring himself in the environment and against society and societal pressure. So I'll say he worked for almost 20 years as a columnist at publishing things in the newspaper. So you see in the image on the bottom, that's one of his spreads on or one of his pages on the bottom of in a newspaper and the *Ming Pao* Hong Kong newspaper. So he has a very social form of working even though it's kind of like individual in how he moves around to make the work.

This work here, he was attending trials in Hong Kong after the Umbrella Movement, and he would do kind of like automatic drawing instead of drawing the people you know, in like court and standard courthouse imagery, he would do automatic drawing and find the meaning behind it and afterward and interpreted and turned it into these this wallpaper which is a wallpaper of nightmares.

I think finally, Alessandro Rolandi. I know from Beijing and he is a performer and also does many things but he's been an ink painter for a long time in kind of Chinese ink painting, and there's even a kind of like, parallel art world in China of ink painting of traditional arts kind of and he shows his work there too. So this is a is a series of ink drawings of this character called the Old Daoist and going through this kind of like strange new high tech and high surveillance world reality and in kind of very strange people by strange characters that are on the edges of the current situation like pangolins and bats and robots and things like that. So I think he pointed out that our sense of time has worked a lot that we were forced to go kind of like far into the future it feels. He doesn't live in China now anymore because of the pandemic and he went first to Italy, then France and now he's in Switzerland each time landing in the first wave lockdowns. So I think it was under that pressure that he was making these drawings.

So oh, this is his joke. "These books are the presence or the proof of the existence of God and these books prove the existence of Silver Surfer Wolverine, Magneto galacticos, Spider Man, Captain Marvel, Nova Cyclops and the other X Men, Phoenix and you know, you get it".

So the question is "Is this the end?" Because the book often is sort of like a summary of a project and I was hoping that it wouldn't be because it's such a strange topic and that it is impossible that just a few words could represent something so big. These are some just AI made generated images of spirituality and art we can kind of like get a sense of what we already know what to expect when we think of these terms spirituality and we think that we know what it means.

The absurdity of claiming the book as an exhibition The reason I wanted to include some comedies it's because of that absurdity. And because also, it's absurd that we have that. It's like an object. It's an exhibition that you're supposed to buy. It's almost like a commodity. And we need to laugh about that because it doesn't seem right, that you're supposed to, but I'll send you a copy if you want. I'll avoid going through any other of my jokes. And this unsatisfying conclusion, so maybe we can just go straight to Jeanne to satisfy us.

Jeanne

Well, you know, what I already wrote to you, which I think the concept of spirituality is on life support by New Agers. It's in its dying days is having any kind of friggin resonance whatsoever for communities, and therefore how could it if not for our community, how could it have any kind of practice connected with it or communion connected with it? It's just gone as far as I'm concerned. The world has outlived its meaning, I guess, in my mind that's what I would say. I would say that the idea of, of a practice or a praxis based on belief is still very, very relevant in the works in this exhibition. The tragedy of it being that many practices, many art practices or memorial practices tend to come out as you know, as I said to you come out of individual angst and we are deeply deeply into the stages of rancid individualism in the Western world. So that what is a conundrum for me is worth what kind of practices or rituals given what our context is, could be communal at all. I'm puzzling over that one I've lost all optimism that individualism could be diluted by any form of communal activity that has any has any power and the reason I'm saying power is because as you know, I also said, I consider science to be the only remaining institution in which we are all called to believe in. I can't think of anything else that is we are called to believe in, in fact, better believe in for one of a better alternative in our present conditions. You could say that we're called to believe in consumerism but I think that is a slimy, ever changing landscape that doesn't require really doesn't require belief. Now I say that I wrote a book called "Shopping Cart Pantheism" in which I claimed that it was a new religion that is really worth embracing materialism and consumerism as the highest form of belief. But I've not if I'm not mistaken, I think that was satiric whereas what I've been saying prior to mentioning that book it's not satiric I don't know what you think, Michael I mean, I asked you why you whether you pondered over the word credos, or credo, or whether that was not a soul searching so to speak decision to to use that for your projects.

Michael

Well, I liked the connection between the market and belief because it's the root of credit and credit card and that it was mostly that I it's not a word that I used a lot before. I don't go around asking what your credo is or anything like that. Is that a word that's used in science that you know of?

Jeanne
creed or, or credit? Yeah, well, credit, accreditation?

Michael
Yeah.

Jeanne
You gotta have accreditation in science, but nobody ever says "Do you believe in science?" That means among scientists, they would not say "Well, well, let's make sure we all believe in science here. We all believe in the scientific method'.

Michael
I found that while I was trying to research a some like, the new Atheism a little bit, and I found that they make frequent some of them are scientists and they make frequent claims of the arguments they have are about whether there's evidence or not, so that they're applying like scientific questions to religion, sort of, is there anything to support the claim that marriage is between man and woman or something like that. And if there's an overall or like an overemphasis on science that sometimes there's nothing else there in this way, like I tried to ask I call I tried to call in to an atheist talk show on YouTube, and I didn't get past the screener because I wanted to ask them if they're also proposing something that like, because science has been so linked to corporations, is there some critique and an alternative that they'd like to offer? And I could just got hung up on basically he said, like, "oh, no, you can go to the forum and ask people on the forum if you want to ask that we're not we don't get into politics" kind of. And science divorced from politics. It's kind of like what we're left with right now where you have these. I will just say that there's a lot of people who believe strange things that we see right now. I was walking down the street in Ottawa on Monday, and there's faith and crucifixes all over these trucks, and people believing this, that and the other thing and then on the other hand, we have this science that we're trying to follow but it's changing all the time. Anyway, I'm not trying to cause any or provoke any debate about that, but it's just like the context of this project is also this pandemic and the crisis and belief there. I have gone off topic.

Jeanne
You know what, my God when I look at this well, okay, let me just say something about scientists for the main part if they're in public, or if they're writing in an authorized situation, then have to invoke Vidkun Stein here. They are devoted to the language game of science, and they don't know how to speak any other language except the language of science, which leads me to what I would say psychoanalytically is that there that belief as a process, even a process shared by a group, such as scientists is a very mysterious heart and mind process that it is very hard to find words for. And particularly in an age of disbelief. It is very hard to find words for belief

there's no psychoanalytic term for the word belief there are only terms around it such as delusion, fixed idea, idée fixe, illusion, but the scientists never would, I wonder whether they would address the idea, I believe in the scientific method and with an emphasis on the belief part, or would they stick to their language game of honoring evidence and the methods that lead to credible evidence truly as devotedly as someone might present all their evidence for the landing of aliens from another planet. This is fascinating, all I'm trying to say is from my point of view, psychoanalytically the ability to believe and cling to a belief is sort of lies in the background of these various well, I call them language games, I mean, the new agers have their language game the side have their language game. Fortunately, to a certain extent what's truly honorable about your exhibition book here is that it doesn't stick to one particular language game because artists are not in the business, so to speak of making systems out of which you cannot escape.

Michael

And so there's a bit of irony there. And does that question, to return to the question of respect like respecting the context? Like to show artwork in a church do you find... Well, first of all, it sounds like you're not sold on the idea of spirituality?

Jeanne

No, I think it's bunk at this point. It wasn't always bonk. That's sort of sad, it's tragic. But I think it's one of those words, one of those ideas that has to be sustained by some quasi systematic community of practitioners. It can't just float around like it does unconnected anything but goofy artworks or crystals. Now I'm saying that as my opinion but I'm not saying belief is bogus. I'm not saying that a creed is bogus. I'm not saying that ritual. I'm not saying a ritual or a prayer, none of those things are still truly graspable by human action and connection, but spirituality. I think it's done.

Michael

So how would you describe those practices? Then? Like, can we do them seriously? And yet, still somewhat ironically, or detached from I don't know what, what would turn them in...

Jeanne

You know, the word that comes to mind and it's a word that was really hot in the 50s. "Value systems, practices, rituals, memorials, creativity, community" are all possible within a value system. But there's no huge institution like science, whose value system is quite so clear these days. It would have to be a value system with a much smaller community I would think bordering on cold sometimes. I'm not saying that's good. An irony is good. So we need irony to me, I still go with as I said to you in our emails. Marshall McLuhan's idea of a probe that you put in something that could be hilarious and mean or silly. Or, outlandish. It's meant to probe the situation and not to attack it.

Michael

Yeah. I'm still a bit uneasy, although I agree with you, but because I mean, because irony is so much used. I'm totally committed to irony, but it's, I notice how much it's used by the mean guys.

The monsters they've made it their own and you know, and it's actually in some ways, at the service of actual beliefs, but really monstrous ones like hierarchy and supremacism and things like that, but it just kind of like it means that you don't have to put that thing on your face right away. It tricks people but so yeah, I'm torn about that.

Jeanne

Especially these days, absolutely. In these times, we live in which consumerism and which consumerism itself is a practice even in our own minds. So you look around you turn your head another way and somebody has already consumed something that was valuable and turned it into shit, that that hurts other people. This is a process of our society. And it's not recognized when is much when ideas or memes or images are consumed in that way. It's much more record recognizable in the shopping context.

Michael

Should we ask if anyone has any questions or comments to make? I don't know if we have to open it somehow. Or if it they can just tune in maybe I'll stop. Now we could keep the screen on I guess but hum, Michaëlle? Do we have to open it so people can ask?

Michaëlle

I was actually just about to message everyone in the chat to see if anyone has questions. But yeah, the floor is open for questions. And as I said before, you can ask questions in French or English. So I actually did have a question but you kind of answered it. But partially, I was asking myself because Credos is like a multi phase project. And now with the book it sounds like it's like the end of the project. But is it necessarily the end of the project? Or could it be like a second book or second book exhibition or even a series of talk with the contributors because now we have Jean but could it be with Jamie or any other contributors to to add something more to continue the conversation

Michael

I would hope so. I think that I think it feels like we only scratched the surface of the church bazaars. It's it's funny that it we had to kind of jump that out of that boat so fast, but I think because it's such an unwieldy concept. It's not very easy to our real live humans are leaving now. But they've had enough. But I think I saw them in Ottawa actually. Just kidding. I think that it could, yeah, it deserves more attention, but maybe a rethinking of the format in some way, but I don't really know. A movie because we had a radio show we had the book now. It's we got to make the the straight to Netflix movie well as

Jeanne

exclude me out on that one.

Michael

We get some good editors some CGI. I'll just say if whether people ask or not. The exhibition is it's not an exhibition book launch it these are the books which by the way, yeah. So they they're hanging on the wall. They come with a golden nail. And on this little leather strap, there's this G

string made of spandex that's holding the book in. You take it out easily from the spine like this. And it has that one color plate and it has some samples of Mr. Packs. A nightmare wallpaper. Um, it easily fits onto a bookshelf so it's very versatile. They look good in a cluster and some of the the fabric is from Mina and some of it is from other sources and there's some very one of a kind things this is was screenprinted about 20 years ago and NAS CAD by me so that's my pitch. I wanted this to be more of a sales pitch and I was going to play it up I had I was going to kind of do an infomercial and stuff but I just really lost confidence so I'm sorry

Michael

No, we were a weird thing. thankful that you didn't try that. We're thankful that books do not come with it. The exhibitions do not come with jokes. Don't worry So someone asked that. Yeah, we've, where are we on the time?

Michaëlle

And actually, we just went a bit further than what we were expecting but I was still wondering if anyone has more questions but also I wanted to add Michael The frames are really important because every fabric when we discussed it that yesterday every fabric have like a whole story on itself. So it's really interesting to be able to buy the book but the frame also because they they all have a history on themselves. Yeah.

Michael

Do you want a history that you don't really want to hear? The one I'm holding the one I'm holding used to be boxer shorts so Tommy Hilfiger? I always thought that yeah, maybe the movie because I can actually address this right now that Credos The movie will be science fiction and Tommy Hilfiger will be President of the United States because great name recognition. And he's like a ghost. He's already there. He's on you. If anyone wants to collaborate on there Yeah, so Well, I'll be here these this will be set up for another two days. Until set and Saturday if you want to come by.

Michaëlle

Yes. Thank you so much, everyone. So we're gonna close the discussion. I'm really happy that we had this privilege to have you Jean as one of the contributors but also to be able to hear you about the project. So as Michael said before, the gallery is open to from noon to six, Friday and Saturday if you want to come and Michael will also be physically at the gallery and the books you can you can buy the books at the gallery and choose your own frame also. Thank you.