



INTERVIEW WITH ESTABLISHED ARTIST
AND OCAD U ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

GARY TAXALI

BY MAGGIE BRODA

Maggie Broda: Thank you for sharing your time and thoughts Gary. You are both an alumni of OCAD University (OCA, Communication & Design, 1991) and an Associate Professor at the University. How has your relationship with OCADU influenced your career?

Gary Taxali: When I first began teaching I viewed it as a refreshing excuse to get out of the studio. I embraced the idea of helping students understand their work. However within a few years it be-

came clear that teaching is more than that. It has made me a better artist. It requires me to rationalize and articulate to my students the process of creating a visual language that effectively communicates. The critiques with students were invaluable in creating my list of ways that I have discovered in time to help me and them understand this. Each year I expand on this. When I present and lecture around the world I benefit from having had some rehearsal in the classroom environment. This really helps with my own practice. My

students are amazing. They are not collectors or clients. They seek answers to support their own work and so we have open and constructive dialogues. They know when you are being honest about art. You can never give them false information because they will see right through you.

M.B. You graduated from OCAD University in Design but your current work is exhibited in galleries internationally. Tell me about your cross-disciplinary approach to being both an Artist and a Designer?

How has OCADU helped shape your thinking?

G.T. Well I can tell you that I was taught by Canada's "Best of the Time". OCADU has always been the Mother Ship, Conduit... THE PLACE... where you learn to think, to see, where the visual is paramount, learning about: Self-authorship and having a point of view is what a good arts education is about and OCADU has always provided that. Every year I took a course in Abstract painting as contrast to my design and Illus-



tration classes, but that worked for me and I needed that balance. Art is Design even when it is intuitive, they are less polarized than most people think, this is how I see things. Commercial illustration, galleries for fine art, for me and my work, one can not exist without the other. The portfolio should have both. I think of when I taught at the Denmark School of Design where the government decides how many students will enroll in art courses based on the economy and the number of jobs available for artists. Artists there are more humbled by this honesty.

M.B. I understand that you are constantly working and creating. Can you take us through the process of developing an idea into a piece of art?

G.T. Well, I jump in headfirst. Gallery shows require mapping out due to the logistics of having a set space in which to display my work. I do not have a sketchbook or use a pencil. I don't want anything to be removed once I begin; I want to stay true to the initial mark. I use a permanent pen to develop an idea from the starting point. Meditation is important to my daily routine. Thinking is not good for creativity because the mind is not where ideas come from. Eventually I decide if my work should become a print or to blow up the image or what other direction to take. I like to keep my process open.

M.B. Your shows have been successful in: New York, L.A., Spain, Italy, Germany. Do the reactions to your work differ according to location?

G.T. Yes. Culturally I would say my work relates to the East Coast, Toronto and New York scene. However I am continually thought to be from California where I first began showing. It's a reflection of the gallery's

narrative. I have no gallery representation in Canada. Waddingtons (Canada's largest and very prestigious Art Auction House) gave me a solo show in January 2014, which was great. I was the first contemporary pop artist to have a show there. Cultural sensibility varies in Europe and US. You can tell by the sales where the similar aesthetics are.

M.B. Currently you teach at the Sharp Centre for Design, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. What's it like to work and teach in this iconic building?

G.T. I love it. There is a particular 6th floor room that I occupy that

has the most spectacular view south down McCaul St.. You can see the Sky Dome, the C.N. Tower and all the towers around them. There are tiny windows near the floor that frame the city views, like wonderful gems everywhere.

M.B. You have designed coins for the Canadian Mint, pocket-squares for Harry Rosen, had your characters made into toys, created children's books and have also been nominated for and Grammy Award for designing an album cover. What's next for Gary Taxali?

G.T. I have a schedule that includes more group shows. In the fall I will

be showing in Montreal at Yves La Roche Gallery. I am working with the Jonathan Levine Gallery in NYC on new limited edition prints as well as private commissions and more pocket squares for Harry Rosen. I designed an electric light boxed that the city has installed at intersections to beautify the city. It's a great time to be an artist.

M.B. I couldn't agree more. Thank you Gary. This has been a pleasure.



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QUESTIONS WITH RBC 2014 PAINTERS' COMPETITION FINALIST CARLY BUTLER

BY MARY KIM

Tolstoy tells us that goodness in art must be linked to its essential purpose. Where, in the contemporary ocean of shift and flux, would we be if we were not continually envisioning and re-imagining what this essential purpose might be? As much as art nurtures our dialogues on society, so the cyclical nature of influence invigorates the very definition of purpose and provides a firm hold for our flailing hands. From influence on urban and ecological issues, design and culture, to how young people are educated in our schools, if art envisions purpose; art is where dialogue must begin.

Each year, The RBC Painters' Competition, in collaboration with the Canadian Art Foundation, invigorates the imagination of the country by highlighting emerging artists across Canada. In June 2014, fifteen emerging visual artists were announced as finalists for this year. Five artists were selected from each of the three Canadian regions: five each from Western Canada, Central Canada, and Eastern Canada.

The winner will be announced on October 1st, 2014.

Carly Butler is one of these finalists, currently living and working in Halifax, Nova Scotia. A graduate of Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, Butler is an interdisciplinary artist, whose work is infused with elemental notions of environment, transience and nostalgia. Her winning piece, a visual work entitled 'Hurricane,' is a thin line of ink and graphite confidently dipping down, then up in a hesitant stroke on the vast, blank canvas of gessoed drywall. Butler, whom I had a chance to chat with over a series of email conversations, tells us that 'Hurricane' speaks to "the disconnect between a romantic longing for the sea, and the reality of our lack of understanding and ability to function in the natural world."

It is hard to believe that this idea could have been any more poignant than it is today – our vast, global connections, shaped and propagated by advances in technology, both evolve and devastate our

social and natural worlds. We build great cities over fault lines, entirely devoid of significance to us until we are shaken down to crumbs and ash. Tsunamis, volcanoes, avalanches and tornadoes constantly remind us that no matter how close to the sun we fly, we remain small and powerless against the mighty gods of the elemental world. We strive to move about, metaphorically and physically, ever-searching for 'home,' and a place we can remain safe. But where is that place?

In Anna Karenin, Tolstoy compares the child to a compass, inhabiting "in Anna a feeling akin to the feeling of a sailor who sees by the compass that the direction in which he is swiftly moving is far from the right one, but that to arrest his motion is not in his power, that every instant is carrying him further and further away, and that to admit to himself his deviation from the right direction is the same as admitting his certain ruin." Part of a larger body of work entitled 'Weather Code,' Butler's 'Hurricane' and her work exploring lan-

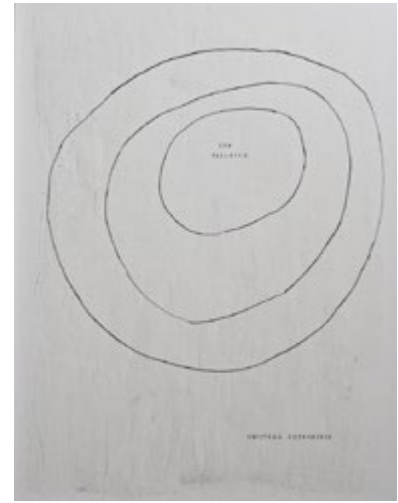
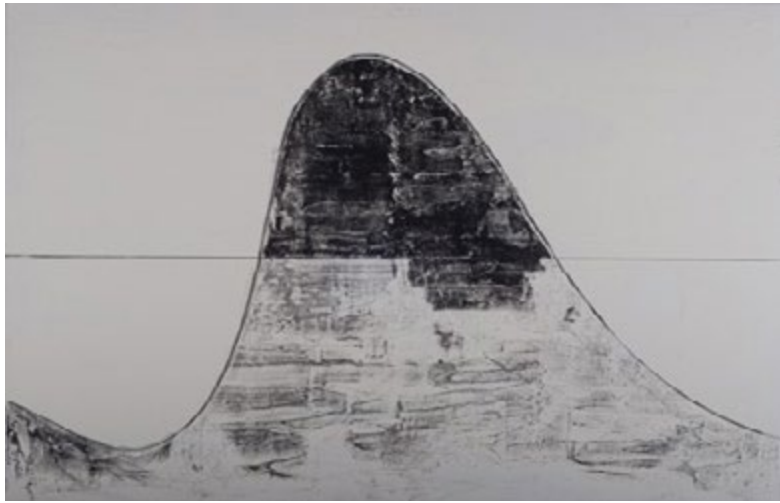
guage, line, geography and nature, draws us in quietly and with subtle humour to contemplate our own sense of direction and purpose, or, our tenuous relationships with the world around us. Where are you? And what are you doing here? Are two central questions I can't help but ask myself when looking at her work.

Questions for Carly Butler

Mary Kim Hi Carly. Congratulations again. What were your thoughts upon hearing the announcement that you were an RBC Painter's Competition finalist?

Carly Butler Thank you! Every year the RBC competition contributes to a national dialogue about contemporary art in Canada and it's very exciting to be part of it as a finalist. It's definitely helpful career wise as it can open many doors. It doesn't change the way I work, but it is motivating.

M.K. You are an interdisciplinary artist working in a variety of mediums from photography to



video, sculpture and installation, and, as found your piece ‘Hurricane’ which made it to the RBC Finalists’ round, drawing. Can you speak a bit about your interdisciplinary approach, process and style?

C.B. My work is primarily idea-based, so I simply use whatever medium I feel will be most effective for each piece.

The choice of medium often comes down to narrative intention: what story am I trying to tell and what is the best way to tell it? Video obviously allows for a lot of flexibility, but sometimes an idea translates best on a two-dimensional surface. For works like ‘The Weather Code’ I’m interested in symbols and language, so drawing and painting were appropriate in this context. Sometimes the physical process of creating a line or writing text is important. That said, I like to make room for other materials when it seems necessary. ‘Beware of Pride’, for example, is part of the same series about weather and navigation but is a compass I have altered so it continuously rotates. The piece speaks to the same ideas as the works on paper and canvas, but in a different way that I hope enhances the body of work as a whole.

M.K. Which is your favourite medium?

C.B. I don’t really have a fa-

vourite medium, though drawing is always an essential part of my process, particularly at the beginning.

M.K. How did you begin your career as an artist? Who and what are your influences?

C.B. I’ve always made art, though I took a somewhat different and circuitous path, pursuing a Masters in art history first, and then attending Central Saint Martins in London.

My influences are many and varied, but primarily rooted in conceptualism. John Baldessari is one of my all-time favourite artists, and probably a major reason why I ended up at NSCAD. Formally I greatly admire Agnes Martin. Tacita Dean’s work has also had a great influence on me, particularly her work around the sailor Donald Crowhurst.

M.K. You currently live in Halifax, Nova Scotia. You have lived also in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan and Sooke, British Columbia. Not only does your work seem to reflect your relationship to nature and environment, as in your ‘Weather Code’ and ‘Error of Judgement’ series, but also a dialogue between permanence and transience, as well as memory, particularly in your video work. Can you speak to that a bit?

C.B. I’ve moved around a lot, and I do struggle with the idea of remaining permanently in one

place. This struggle does permeate my work – the idea that ‘here’ is never good enough – and also seems to be a preoccupation of modern life, the idea that we have to keep moving and travelling in order to be somehow relevant. It also comes from my upbringing as the daughter of a sailor and as part of a family who was planning, basically my entire life, to take off around the world on a boat. They only found the ‘right’ boat after I had already left home and was studying in the UK, so a lot of my work reflects on this sense of longing and missed opportunity.

M.K. Would you consider yourself a philosopher?

C.B. I actually failed a logic and reasoning philosophy course in University, so would never dream of calling myself a philosopher! But I believe most interesting artists are philosophers to some extent, so it’s a flattering proposition. I am drawn to artists whose work asks the big questions, or even more interestingly, the little questions about the big things.

M.K. You did a show last year here in Toronto at PM Gallery in Toronto. ‘Hurricane’ is part of the larger series ‘Weather Code,’ based on the writings of French sailor Bernard Moitessier. How did you come across his writing, and what inspired you to explore Moitessier’s career further in this series? Tell me

about ‘Hurricane’ and how it came to be your selection for submission.

C.B. ‘Hurricane’ is part of the same body of work, but more about the disconnect between a romantic longing for the sea, and the reality of our lack of understanding and ability to function in the natural world. All the works I submitted were part of this same series (‘Hurricane’ is the one of the jury selected), and explore language, line, and our distance from various forms of knowledge. Embodying a sense of abject humour, they poke light fun at those who don’t understand the codes of weather and language of the sea (myself included) by encouraging new interpretations and playing with words. The truth of the works, however, lies in the respectful representation of real weather and navigational symbols. They are affectionate accurate abstractions and tread carefully between reverence and absurdity.

The works are rooted in the domestic through the use of dry-wall compound – speaking of an unfulfilled desire to live differently and escape the confines of conventional living.