



Trading Routes:

Rivers, Fish, and Oil, Creative Placemaking through Aesthetic Engagement

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Abstract

This paper considers the important role of art in our lives and explores its potentiality for creative placemaking, breaking down barriers between contemporary art and historical spaces. We explore new possibilities for art and museum practice to creatively craft spaces for aesthetic engagement through the examination of the Trading Routes: Rivers, Fish, and Oil (TR) exhibition at the Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site (GOG) in Steveston, British Columbia. We discuss the opportunities and challenges of presenting a controversial contemporary art exhibition in a historical museum. Exploring the ways the TR exhibition created an opportunity for creative placemaking to occur within a larger context of enhancing the reflections and experiences of individuals, as well as addressing quality of life within communities.

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This article considers the important role of art in our lives and explores its potentiality within creative placemaking with the aim of breaking down existing barriers between contemporary art and historical spaces. By way of example, the focus will be on the contemporary art exhibition Trading Routes: Rivers, Fish and Oil (TR) at the Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site (GOG), in Steveston, British Columbia. The goal of this article is to illustrate how contemporary art and museums have the creative potential to craft physical and social spaces for visitors through aesthetic engagement. These 'border crossings' will be explored to stimulate new and productive dialogues in the pursuit of possibilities for art and museum practices.

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The first section considers the preliminary conversations between artists/ researchers, GOG museum professionals, and the GOG Society, who operate the site, to understand how each party identified and negotiated the opportunities and challenges of presenting a controversial contemporary art exhibition in a traditional social history museum. This consideration will illuminate ways in which artistic practices and arts-based research can inform and extend museological practices.

The next section, Creative Placemaking: Creatively Crafted Spaces for Aesthetic Engagement, discusses the encounters between contemporary art and museum spaces as well as the transformation of 'space' to 'place' through creative placemaking. A range of visual strategies, including the producing and curating of the artwork, is highlighted to show how these approaches

prompted questioning, dialogue, and debate on social and environmental issues related to the increasing development of fossil fuel extraction industries.

In the third section, Museums as a Pedagogical - Social Space, the physical relationship between the TR exhibition and the permanent GOG museum displays will be reflected on as pedagogical engagement through observing visitor responses and analyzing interviews with museum interpreters.

The paper concludes with a summary of the findings. We found evidence indicating that presenting contemporary art in historical museum spaces creates opportunities for creative placemaking to occur within a larger context of enhancing pedagogical reflections and experiences of individuals as well as addressing quality of life within communities.

Trading Routes: Rivers, Fish and Oil

To introduce the exhibition Trading Routes: Rivers, Fish and Oil (TR) at the Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site (GOG), the political and historical context in which it is immersed must be addressed. The TR exhibition responded to political and media attention surrounding increased natural resource extraction and proposed oil pipelines in British Columbia. Controversial debates still cloud the proposed pipelines which would transport crude oil from the Athabasca tar sands in Alberta, to Kitimat, British Columbia. The pipeline is intended to traverse remote and rugged terrain to the pristine Pacific coast, where crude oil would then be loaded onto tankers that would travel through the treacherous waters of the Douglas Channel to reach global markets. Discussion surrounding the pipeline project began in the 1970s, and its implementation has been postponed several times due to opposition. This ranged “from the Alberta tar sands to the Pacific coast of British Columbia, as the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council and their member communities have asserted the authority to prevent this project from passing through their unceded territories” (McCreary & Milligan, 2014, p. 115). Despite opposition, the proposed pipeline infrastructure and its operation would be constructed along the corridor of the traditional First Nations trade routes. According to anthropologist Hugh Brody “this corridor has for thousands of years been an economic and social heartland” (Brody, 1981, p. 30) for the First Nations people. The trails connecting the Pacific Northwest coast with the Interior overland route are known as the Grease Trails. Along these routes, items such as eulachon oil (grease from a small fish) were traded for furs, copper, and obsidian. Eulachon oil, once an important economic, cultural, and social commodity amongst many First Nations communities, also provided sustenance. As a renewable resource, it stands in sharp contrast with the damaging effects and unsustainable practices of fossil fuel extraction and use.

This overlapping history and physical geography of the Grease Trails and proposed pipeline route within the First Nations territories formed the basis for Trading Routes: Grease Trails, Oil Pipelines (2013-2017), a research and creation project, led by artist/researcher Ruth Beer, together with a team of artists, educators, and museum professionals. The socially engaged, trans-disciplinary project aims to promote dialogue and exchange addressing the impacts of energy (fossil fuel) extraction, transportation, and use, including the effects of climate

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change on everyday life. The research focuses specifically on sites impacted by the pipeline construction in remote communities. The project asserts that art has an important role in bringing new perspectives and diverse voices to this conversation. By asking ‘uncertain questions’, the exhibit addressed “socio-economic and environmental trajectories of petrocultures, aboriginal cultures, and art intersections” (Beer and Olauson, 2014, p. 2) through which “both [the] making [of] art and experiencing art has the potential to open humans to modes of being, understanding, and experiencing previously unknown or articulated knowledge” (Anderson & Guyas, 2012, p. 232). The multi-year Trading Routes: Grease Trails, Oil Pipelines project engages in dialogue with indigenous and non-indigenous artists, teachers, museum professionals, elders, and activists about changes related to resource extraction within the context of this contested geography. As the Trading Routes: Grease Trails, Oil Pipelines project serves as a point of convergence for timely dialogue about regional, national, and global futures through art practice, it is also interested in producing research and creation surrounding a specific site. This created a sense of place, which prompted the idea for collaboration with the GOG, resulting in the exhibition entitled Trading Routes: Rivers, Fish and Oil (TR).

The GOG is located in the village of Steveston at the juncture of the mouth of the Fraser River and the Gulf of Georgia. The museum was selected because of the cannery’s significant historical connection with the fishing/canning industry and the community that expanded around it. Built in 1894, the GOG Cannery was once the largest building of its kind amongst the fifteen canneries that lined Steveston’s waterfront, known as ‘Cannery Row’ (Yesaki, Steves & Steves, 2005, p. 5). In the early 20th century, Steveston was world renowned as the “salmon capital of the world” (Yesaki, Steves, & Steves, 2005, p. 5). During the busy fishing season, Steveston expanded threefold as local people came to labour in



Figure 1. Gulf of Georgia National Historic Site (Beer, 2015)

fishing, canning and boat building (Baker, 2014). The community consisted of a multi-ethnic workforce of First Nations, Chinese, Japanese, and European descent. The GOG Cannery operated from 1893 as a salmon canning line and herring reduction plant until it closed its doors in 1979. Today, the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society operates the cannery as an

important community cultural resource for historical interpretation, tours, and educational programs. An annual year-long temporary exhibition is a major programming component for this historic site.

In 2014, the Trading Routes: Grease Trails, Oil Pipelines project's artist/researchers began to explore the possibility of contemporary artwork being exhibited at the GOG. They needed no introduction as a collaborative working relationship had been established five years earlier during an artistic research project entitled, Catch and Release (www.catch-and-release.ca). The TR exhibition proposal presented TR artwork with the intention of sharing and exploring ideas derived from the project's social/environmental themes and findings. Their proposal included developing synergies with the GOG's mission and mandate of environmental protection and sustainability (R. Beer, personal communication, April 18, 2015).

The GOG museum professionals and Society Board's interest in the project was especially strong because of the links with eulachon fish and the historic Grease Trails. The exhibition proposal aligned with the museum's mandate of stewardship of rivers and salmon, which held the potential to enhance the stories told through the permanent exhibits. It also aligned with the GOG's aim to work with community groups to diversify their audiences and presentation themes (R. Clarke, personal communication, July 16, 2015). According to Rebecca Clarke, the Executive Director of the GOG, in past years programming had been relatively "historically heavy" with exhibitions such as Ryoshi – Nikkei Fishermen of the BC Coast (April 2013 – April 2014) and Solidarity on Ships and Shore (May 2014 – March 2015). According to her, the TR proposal both suited the available facility space and addressed the need for more contemporary projects. "This exhibition was considered to be a good fit because the GOG has rarely presented contemporary art exhibitions" (R. Clarke, personal communication, July 16, 2015). An increasing trend "in the past decade [is that] historical museums are starting to include contemporary art exhibitions as a way to push boundaries by connecting the past with the present in new forms. These exhibitions aim to appeal to new

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audiences” (Karen Lee, personal communication, Nov. 7, 2015). Combining contemporary art, relevant history, and literal fisheries connections solidified both parties’ interests in the TR exhibition. It provided an opportunity to present different perspectives about natural resource extraction, salmon fishing, and environmental sustainability through artworks and art-based research.

This interest was laced with concern. The GOG Society Board had reservations about presenting a contemporary art exhibition focused on controversial national debates about contested geography and the advisability of proposed pipelines when the popular media was depicting incendiary polarized opinions. They were concerned about how people would respond to the TR exhibition. Many questions arose. Was there conflict between the controversial nature of the exhibition and the GOG as a publicly funded site? Would the exhibit alienate local communities or incite anger among funders and other stakeholders? Concerns were based on an assumption that the TR project was taking an anti-pipeline stance, which was not the case. The TR exhibition was not intended to protest pipelines, but rather to address questions about environmental, social, and economic issues being raised by pipeline proposals. The exhibition would offer a wide range of viewpoints within the context of First Nations historical fishing practices and explore the current situation of uncertainty with respect to natural resource extraction and environmental sustainability. After weighing these opportunities, challenges, and possible outcomes, the GOG Society Board of Directors agreed to move forward with the TR exhibition.

Creative Placemaking: Creatively Crafted Spaces for Aesthetic Engagement

In executing the next step, it was paramount for the TR artist/researchers and GOG museum collaborators to consider the ways they could creatively craft the museum’s temporary exhibition space to promote visitor engagement. The goal was to enable the visitors to understand and navigate one’s place in this contested geography through aesthetic engagement. Critical community planner Tom Borrop (2011) believed taking a mere ‘space’ and turning it into ‘place’ means creating something collectively valued and used by the community (Borrop, 2011). He refers to this process as ‘creative placemaking,’ which involves “creating a social purpose and process of creating a social purpose and/or identity for a particular location...and/or animating a place” (Borrop, 2011, p. 245). The TR exhibition aimed to foster creative placemaking by portraying a variety of voices, opinions, and social interactions among artists, visitors, and community partners in the GOG temporary exhibit location. The exhibition engaged the public in dialogue with the intention of expanding visitors’ consciousness about the issues at stake. This ambition was approached in two ways. Firstly, it considered how to include a diversity of voices from various geographical areas in

British Columbia. Secondly, it drew upon the existing historical narratives of permanent GOG displays and the aesthetic affective content and sensibility of the contemporary artwork. The goal was to engage with the visitor's personal experience, knowledge, and belief systems which they bring to the site.

In order to fulfill their ambitions, discussion between TR artists/researchers and GOG museum professionals centered largely on the selection of artwork. An important consideration was how the exhibition could best represent, connect, and include not only varied perspectives from northern communities but also "expand the dialogue to include the people of the lower mainland" (Karen Lee, personal communication, July 6, 2015). By extending the geographical range, the exhibition could foster a broader conversation and understanding of the historical and contemporary issues of natural resource extraction in British Columbia while building stronger north/south relationships in the province. It was thought that these conversations could highlight the similarities and differences in how urban and remote northern rural communities are being directly impacted by fossil fuel extraction. In order to inform the work, text panels presented individual quotes and historical and contemporary contextual information in relation to natural resource extraction, rivers, and fish in the province. Some artwork reflected fishing industry historical narratives; however, the artworks primarily related to present conditions and imagined futures.

Another concern raised in the desire to support viewer experience of the exhibition was the fact that most GOG visitors do not usually attend the museum to participate in the arts. While it was thought visitors could potentially perceive the artwork as controversial, unfamiliar, or surprising, it was, however, important to consider the artistic research context in which the artworks were created. Many of the artworks were produced as both research and creation and derived from TR fieldwork, which included visits to key communities and towns along proposed pipeline routes. It also included interviews with artists, museum directors, and other cultural producers who live in the region (R. Beer, personal communication, Nov. 2, 2015). "Artists increasingly engage in fieldwork practice" (Schneider & Wright, 2006, p. 224), and this critical addition to artistic practice (that is used in other



Figure 2. Trading Routes: Rivers, Fish and Oil (Beer, 2015)

qualitative research practices) can encompass and address controversial issues by posing questions, revealing otherwise obscured histories, and challenging viewers in affective aesthetic ways to reflect on those issues. At the same time, artists can create a “historical dilemma” (Pollock, 2007) within the museum space as they bump up against society and issue challenging questions. Cultural analyst Griselda Pollock (2007) proposes that this historical dilemma can be mediated as a “social relationship within the museum”, which can “eclipse the importance of museums as alternative spaces and collectives as discursive monuments through which related historical debates are recalled” (Pollock, 2007, pp. 32-33). Although the concept of the museum’s social relationship within a community is not new, Pollock reminds us of the roots of museology in North America. In 1909, “John Cotton Dana, the progressive educator and museum director of the Newark Museum advocated for the museums to be ‘useful’ to their communities in ways the community deemed useful” (Schneider, & Wright, 2006, p. 74). While marginalizing contemporary issues within the constructs of a museum framework would create historical dilemma by stifling the inherent possibility of the museum as space for public engagement, Pollock asserts that by “working towards a museological practice that supports ‘difficult knowledge’, we begin to see playing out of Maisti’s assertion that change is not an interlude, but a condition” (Pollock, 2007, pp. 32-33). It is in this “condition” that the TR exhibition functions as an apparatus, effectively challenging the social relationships of fossil fuel industries, environmentalism, and First Nations cultural traditions to produce an effective working relationship, and a creation of shared and changed understanding. Hence, the installation of the TR exhibition within the museum space created a more open and productive institution.

In addition to the politically challenging nature of the work, there were also physical challenges to overcome. The temporary exhibition space is damp with no climate control. It is a long, narrow, and dimly lit space adjacent to and in view of industrial cannery production equipment. Sounds of motors and other atmospheric audio can be heard throughout the museum space. The intention is to emulate the canning machinery line and to enhance the historical experience for visitors. In attending to some of these specificities of the physical facilities, it was decided to mitigate damage of some of the vulnerable photographic artwork and text panels by printing them on specialized materials that could withstand damp conditions. In addition to preserving the physical integrity of the artwork, white walls associated with an art gallery were constructed and installed in the temporary exhibit area.

The visual strategy employed had three aims: (1) to provide a visually uncluttered presentation within the museum space, (2) to create a contemplative place for the museum visitor within the art exhibition space, and (3) to emphasize the physical contrast between the modern art gallery and the “raw” industrial building. This dynamic contrast between the industrial equipment, canning lines, and flats stocked with salmon cans against the more

intentionally interpretive objects, images, and video artworks created an interesting reciprocal, layered relationship which added visual and intellectual textures. The juxtaposition and proximity of the two kinds of spaces connected and informed each other through the content and thematic of each space.

In the context of the museum, the artworks in the TR exhibition, including photography, sculpture, painting, experimental documentary, and digital animation, were permeated by the historical displays and associated narratives acting as a foundation for the interpretation of the artwork. The artists' presented viewers with possible ways to think about or ask questions pertaining to present conditions of uncertainty within our social, political, cultural, and environmental context. The TR exhibition especially related to ideas of uncertainty with the the extraction of fossil fuel in British Columbia and, by extension, globally.



Figure 3. Trading Routes: Rivers, Fish and Oil Exhibition (Beer, 2015)

The exhibition provides a multiplicity of engagements. For example, when first entering the TR exhibition, viewers are met by a panel that pronounces, “Water is Life: Rivers are central to this place.” This text signifies that “the province of British Columbia has access to one-third of Canada’s supply of fresh water.” Acknowledging the importance of water invites visitors to situate themselves within a more globally unifying context as they begin to explore the artwork. They then encounter five themes: Trading Routes: Rivers, Fish and Oil; Fraser River; Eulachon; Industry; and Sacred Headwaters. Posted questions invite the visitor to consider the historical context of the land in connection with First Nations traditional territories, the role of place-based knowledge, the relationship between the human community and nature, and the potential risks and benefits of industrial development. For example, a panel asks:

What is the value of:

51,840 barrels of oil?

A forest?

1.4 billion cubic meters of natural gas?

Access to fresh water?

100 000 jobs?

Healthy Oceans?

History?

Is one worth more than the others?

These challenging questions privilege visitors' former knowledge, while also provoking reflection and a broadened awareness through various viewpoints presented by diverse artists and artistic practices through their use of visual, spatial, and time-based forms, as well as through mediums used in the artworks. Although all artworks contribute to the immersion in the exhibition themes and debates, this article will highlight three: 1. Sound Post, 2. Northern Voices, and 3. God Keep Our Land.

1. Sound Post is an interactive sculpture created by Ruth Beer. The sculpture is composed of vintage salmon cans, the same as those used in the permanent museum displays. These shiny-coated tin cans contain speakers hidden within the closed forms. Marine sounds of boat motors, radio communication, wind, and moving water emerge from the interior space. Stretchy coiled electronic wire joins each of the cans to a central post. The cluster of cans, reminiscent of barnacles or other accretions on pilings of docks and piers, are at a level for easy access to the senses inviting intimate interactivity. The sounds—barely audible—can be heard sufficiently to prompt curiosity. When approaching the sculpture, visitors may respond by holding the cans close to the ear to hear the communication as though from afar, outdoors at sea.

2. Northern Encounters is a 1:10hr video directed and produced by Ruth Beer and edited by Pascale Theoret-Groux. The video consists of a compilation of edited documentary video footage, sounds, and conversations derived from the artist/researchers' fieldwork in communities in Northwest British Columbia located in the path of a proposed oil pipeline. Interludes of digitally animated horizontal and vertical geometry images of the regional landscape punctuated the conversations. The twenty-two participating indigenous and non-indigenous artists, museum directors, curators, teachers, activists, and elders represented in conversation vocalized their perspectives on changes to the physical, social, and cultural landscape for them and their communities due to the development of natural resource



Figure 4. Sound Post (Beer, 2015)



Figure 5. Northern Encounters—Gerald Amos (Beer, 2013)

extraction industries. Included in the diverse voices are Gerald Amos and Louise Avery. Amos, a First Nations environmentalist from the Haisla Nation, speaks about the dangers to the environment and way of life in his community and discussed the disastrous impacts of inevitable oil spills. Avery, Director of the Kitimat Museum and Archives, explains the logistical challenges and disappointing response to a 2014 exhibition she organized, *Energy: Kitimat Questions*, in

which she attempted to initiate debate by posing questions for viewers to reflect upon energy and extraction, rather than presenting a polarized pro or against stance of pipelines.

In an effort to engage the community at the museum through the artwork and carefully researched contextual panels, Avery asked residents to submit questions that would be shared as part of the exhibition. She noted the resistance of the community to voice their opinions openly. Kitimat, the western terminal of the proposed pipeline and the port for transferring crude oil onto massive tankers, is a key site in the debate. She speculated that this hesitancy could be due to fear of angering employers in this “company town”. The interviews documented in the *Northern Encounters* video are significant to the TR exhibition as they frame a wide variety of voices sharing concerns of an uncertain future.

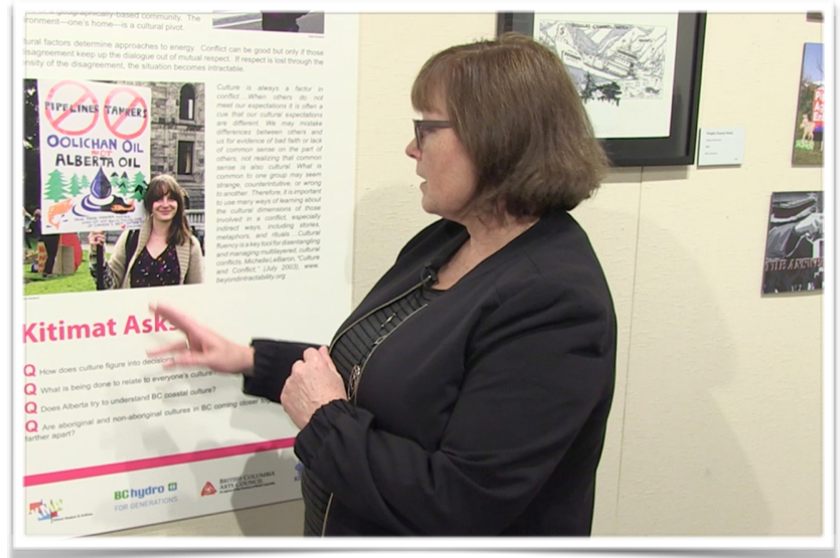


Figure 6. Northern Encounters—Kitimat Museum and Archive –*Energy: Kitimat Questions* (Beer, 2013)

3. First Nations artist Richard Heikkila-Sawan’s sculpture *God Keep Our Land* (2013) is a combination of PVC pipe, a severed tree, plumbing hardware, paint, and soil. The violence of the intersection of splintered tree trunk—its verticality interrupted by the horizontal cut

of the PVC pipe—is made evident at this juncture through the selection and use of materials, form, and structure of the sculpture. As though predicting the future, lying on the soil next to the tree's base is a new piece of pipefitting waiting for assembly. Encircling the soil is a line of plumbing hardware suggesting that the environment is being constrained into increasingly smaller spaces. Together these materials and assembled components present a situation signifying a violent encounter to address metaphorically the need for reconsideration of our actions and a more respectful, interrelated relationship with the natural environment.

These three artworks embody the voices, spoken through artistic mediums, of artists, teachers, museum professionals, activists, and elders who grapple with difficult questions. Using aesthetic means, the artists' works aim to affect viewers emotionally and intellectually. Through engaging multiple sense, these artworks create meaningful personal viewer experiences different from those offered by text or literal didactic representations. The artworks and exhibition expresses the uncertainty that First Nations and non-indigenous communities are experiencing the ecological and cultural changes caused by industry development, particularly along the waterways, landscape, and formerly active Grease Trails of the Pacific Northwest. As described by an exhibition review in the local newspaper, the artworks aspire to enhance “understanding of the impact of industrial development on B.C.’s salmon-bearing rivers—the Fraser, Skeena, Nass, and Stikine—through a collection of artwork, images, video, audio, and text” (Straight, 2015). The TR exhibition skillfully combines information panels interspersed throughout the space with artworks as well as an interactive touch screen map with contextual histories regarding industry and the environment alongside the artworks. Together they create a platform for community-shared experiences of historical narratives, diverse perspectives, and probing questions. The exhibition highlighted strong regional connections of indigenous and non-indigenous people with water, fish, and oil while referencing the potential benefits and negative impacts of fossil fuel extraction and environmental sustainability.

The TR exhibition connected site specific and global contexts of environmental issues to ideas of place making through artworks and narrative text. Installed to enhance the



Figure 7. God Keep Our Land, Richard Heikkla-Sawan (Beer, 2015)

interrelationship between the contemporary artwork, historic building, and artifacts, the TR exhibition promoted dialogic crossings between past and present. In this way the museum displays conceptually illustrated how spaces crafted for aesthetic engagement can foster between contemporary art and history prompting deeper dialogue and engagement with contemporary issues. This reciprocal relationship suggests changing 'space' to 'place', which generates placemaking within the constructs of the museum and the broader communities. This relationship acts as catalyst for envisioning collective futures through the aesthetic engagement of placemaking.

Museums as Pedagogical - Social Spaces

An important component of creative placemaking is pedagogical engagement. Museums have become centers that embrace wide mandates beyond the conservation of artifacts. They have become social and cultural spaces striving to be relevant to present daily life and play a central role in educational community activities. The role of the museum has embraced opportunities as sites for informal learning and pedagogical encounters thus encouraging those relationships through programming and collaborations, such as the contemporary art of the TR exhibition. This enables possibilities to broaden audiences for both the museum and artists as well as building bridges towards the understanding of diverse cultures, histories, and cultural perspectives. Defining culture as the "values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations, and underlying assumptions" (Huntington & Harrison, 2000, p. 15) which exist amongst people. Borrup (2011) contends culture is an operating system, and he suggests, although cultural "operation systems share many commonalities, they don't always work together without some kind of way to translate the signals" (p. 5). Borrup (2011) asserts, "creative community building recognizes that there are many variations, while furthering the ongoing effort to find and build common ground" (Borrup, 2011, p. 5). Whether they be rooted in different professions or economic sectors, or in different ethnic or regional backgrounds, they allow for people to work together (Borrup, 2011). This frames the GOG as a site of creative community, where multiple operating systems are being translated for viewers in both physical and psychological space.

In the case of the TR exhibition, the museum interpreters whose assignment was to help translate these signals described anxiety about their lack of knowledge and training in visual art. They stated that they did not feel confident in interpreting artwork for visitors. As a result, before the opening of the exhibition, the artist/researchers met with the interpretive staff to provide an orientation to the artworks, explain the rationale for the exhibition, and participate in a question and answer exchange. This pedagogical opportunity offered the interpreters a way of seeing the museum as a creative space, connecting the temporary exhibition with the narratives of the more familiar permanent displays. The explanatory exchange and engagement with the artworks created a bridge between the field of art, the

subject of the exhibition, and the potentiality of the museum artist/researcher collaboration making a strong link with the GOG's mandate. Art educators Tom Anderson and Anniina Suominen Guyas postulate that "artistic metaphors are central to embodying and communicating important issues, causing us to attend to those things we deem special, noteworthy, and socially significant . . . while giving people collective power to construct our world" (Anderson & Guyas, 2012, pp. 223-245). The art education involvement of the museum interpreters in connection with the TR exhibition provided an enhanced appreciation of the power of metaphors and "helped them to interpret the exhibition for visitors" (R. Clarke, personal communication, July 16, 2015).

In an observation of over eighty visitors, research was conducted as the interpreters guided viewers in small groups through the TR exhibition. Viewers were then invited to explore the exhibition by themselves. Some voiced their surprise at seeing contemporary art within a social history museum, seeming unsure of how to approach the artwork within the museum space. According to the Community Heritage Coordinator Brooke Lees, "This may be due to visitors' expectations and assumptions that they will be presented with didactic information when they visit a historical museum," (personal communication, Nov. 7, 2015) and the typical experience in a "contemporary art gallery where at most times the visitor explores the artwork on their own and engages in their own interpretations" (R. Beer, personal communication, Nov. 2, 2015). In the TR exhibition, visitors who interacted with interpreters became increasingly engaged. Additionally, they moved more fluidly between the TR exhibition and GOG's historical displays creating an experience more integrated with the space and concept of the collaboration. Several visitors expressed positive responses to this experience, noting they became more aware and sensitive to the relationship of history to the present condition of natural resource industries.

These observations exemplify the potential for productive new dialogues between contemporary art and museum spaces. "Historically, museums have been mirrors of the social values and understandings that surround them, not merely in terms of the value of specific ideas and objects, but also in terms of how museums conceive of things like learning" (Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004, p. 225). In order for a museum to be a site of learning, pedagogical purpose should be founded upon actively questioning a range of intellectually challenging scholarship, research through collections, and exhibitions (Trofanenko & Segall, 2014). Despite the environmental challenges for presenting artwork at the GOG museum, and an increased need for staff training and to assist visitors in negotiating some of the differences in representation strategies between museum displays and artwork, the benefits of sharing knowledge, resources, research, artifact collections, and productive possibilities for implementing new visual strategies, according to the artist/researchers and museum stakeholders, the collaboration is considered an exciting generative

experience. Museum educators Brenda Trofanenko and Avner Segall (2014) state, “In many ways [this is] a departure from the quintessential museum format of displaying various historic objects in a static way” (p. 44) and instead forefronts pedagogical engagement. It can be argued that the museum is a social and cultural space, where facts and didactic displays together with metaphoric, contemplative, and poetic artworks encourage complementary inquiry.

Conclusion

By way of example, this article offers museum professionals new ways to engage in creative placemaking by introducing contemporary art as an aesthetic, pedagogical, and provocative experience within social history museums. In this exploration of the Trading Routes: Rivers, Fish and Oil exhibition process three potential strategies emerged, creating opportunities for museums to engage with contemporary societal issues while developing a sense of place and community.

Firstly, communication between the artist/researchers, museum board, and staff was central to the success of the exhibit. Establishing a mutual understanding through discussion clarified that the exhibit was not about opposing the pipeline but rather offered a range of perspectives, which fostered a deeper awareness of the issues involved. These understandings supported the museum board and staff to develop a capacity for risk-taking in a traditional museum setting by pushing the boundaries of historical museum practice. By presenting a controversial contemporary art exhibition, the museum redefined its place with the community.

Secondly, this collective relationship fostered reciprocity between the artist/researchers and museum team through pooling their knowledge, resources, and research. In doing so, this approach generated possibilities for introducing new visual presentations, storytelling strategies, and aesthetic experiences with material culture. It thus allowed a fresh take on the museum’s collections, which informed the artist/researchers, museum board and staff, and visitors in an innovative way. Additionally, this approach engaged a new audience by attracting artists, environmentalists, activists, cultural producers, and community members who may not have normally visited a historical museum. This was evident at the TR exhibition opening, which was the highest attended exhibit launch in the history of the GOG. The juxtaposition of the permanent historical displays with a contemporary issue based art exhibit provoked different responses to material culture within the museum space. As a consequence, this interconnected collaborative relationship transformed the museum ‘space’ to a ‘place’, whereby, creative placemaking could occur.

Thirdly, it is apparent that the physical encounters between the museum exhibits and contemporary art encouraged pedagogical opportunities between the artist/researchers,

museum board and staff, and visitors. For example, when the artist/researchers taught and guided the museum interpreters through the TR exhibit, this supported the interpreters in understanding the strategies involved when bringing together art exhibitions in parallel with historic museological displays. The interpreters developed a deeper understanding of the intention behind combining artistic metaphors and historical interpretation as an interwoven relational experience. Hence, pedagogical encounters of this kind offered a broader context for museum staff to build upon their historical knowledge by being engaged with contemporary issues and societal concerns.

Collectively, these collaborative, visual, and pedagogical methods suggest a way to break away from traditional approaches used in social history museums. If the core belief is that museums should be useful to a community's well-being (Dana, 1909) engaged in pedagogical learning, taking risks (Pollock, 2007), and understanding and articulating knowledge through art (Anderson & Guyas, 2012), then it is important to include contemporary art in the conversation promoting debate and dialogue with controversial issues. Museum professionals must consider the public role of museums in terms of "public value" (Moore, 1995). This exploration suggests museum engagement with creative placemaking through contemporary art will help to ensure the museum's relevant role as a community resource. Visitors can undergo rich experiences that are laced with meaningful understandings of the world both past and present.

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About the Authors



Kimberly Baker is a museum educator, Lui Institute for Global Issues Scholar at the University of British Columbia and a contemporary artist. She specializes in culturally responsive education (CRE) and collaborates with local and internationally organizations to create innovative exhibits, education and public programs. Kimberly leads the education and programs at the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site, Richmond, British Columbia, Canada. She holds a MA in Art Education from the University of British Columbia

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Ruth Beer is a Vancouver-based artist interested in interdisciplinary approaches to artistic practice. Her artwork that includes sculpture, video, photography and interactive projections has been shown in national and international exhibitions. She has been awarded several public art commissions and is a member of the RCA. She is the recipient of major federal Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grants for research-creation projects. Recent artworks related to the "Trading Routes" project are intended to evoke cultural and geographic transitions through abstraction, representation and processes exploring materials, forms, colour and media. She is a Professor of Visual Art and the Assistant Dean of Research in the Faculty of Visual Art and Material Practice and the Audain School of Visual Art at Emily Carr University of Art and Design.