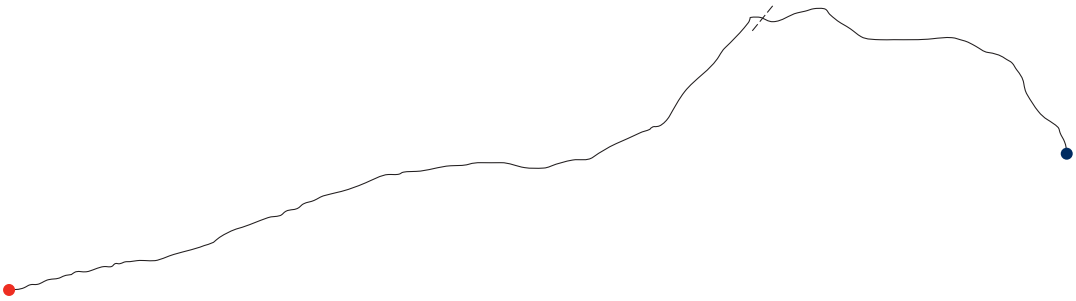
Crossing Borders I and II

An exchange project between **VAC Clarington** and **BluSeed Studios**



Karen Davidson

Tim Fortune

Valerie Patterson

Larry Poole

Peter Seward

Carol Vossler

Chai Duncan

Liz Parkinson

Janice Taylor-Prebble

Sally Thurlow

Todd Tremeer

The youmeus project

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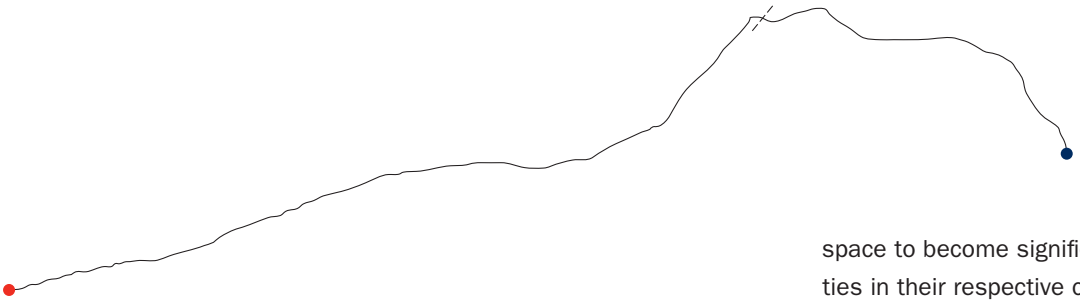
Introduction

by **James Campbell**
The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington
Executive Director



In 2014, Margaret Rodgers, past Director/ Curator of the Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, came to me with an intriguing proposal; an artist exchange between the VAC and BluSeed Studios, in Saranac Lake, NY. With Margaret as Guest Curator, Part I of this endeavor came to compelling fruition in the summer of 2015, when six artists from Saranac came to Clarington to share their work in the galleries of The Cream of Barley Mill. Part II of this exchange shall come to life this spring, when seven Clarington/ Durham Region based artists/curators/ teachers will make the return border crossing, their work to occupy the rooms of BluSeed. Margaret's personal affinity with our colleagues in NY reaches back. As a founding member of IRIS, a Durham Region based collective of women artists, Margaret coordinated a show with fellow IRIS members at BluSeed in 2010.

On an introductory panel that welcomed guests to the VAC show, Margaret observed "This collaboration is inspired by the many parallels between VAC and BluSeed, where both have arisen from repurposed industrial space to become significant cultural entities in their respective communities." Once a functioning mill that produced Cream of Barley Cereal, shipped the world over, the VAC officially came to be in 1974 (Until 1995, named The Visual Arts Centre of Newcastle), with a mandate to celebrate contemporary regional art through diverse exhibition and art educational programming. BluSeed Studios opened its doors in 2002, welcoming all for visual arts exhibitions, workshops, concerts, and community events. The building reaches back to 1930, a one-time hardware store, and train warehouse for cast iron pipes and fittings. A 1905 mill, and a 1930 warehouse; rooms once full of grain and iron now resonate creative energy.

BluSeed founder and Director, Carol Vossler, brought her work north this past summer, accompanied by fellow artists Peter Seward, Valerie Patterson, Larry Poole, Tim Fortune and Karen Davidson. This 'artist exchange' reached beyond the sharing of their captivating personal explorations through painting, printmaking, handmade paper and multi-media installation. Some of the artists took part in a panel discussion at the VAC, with several Clarington artists, VAC board and staff, and community members present.

The artists shared openly their passionate commitment to their art, and their collective vision for BluSeed. As observed by Margaret, 'many parallels' with the VAC indeed emerged. Carol also led a two day workshop in our second floor studio exploring viscosity print-making. A similar sharing of passion, talent and communion will occur during Part II, as some of our artists "cross the border" this spring.

Long-time VAC members, former and current board members, exhibiting artists and instructors, and curators shall represent Clarington proudly by sharing their work and experiences with the good folk of Saranac.

Margaret has coalesced the work of Chai Duncan, Liz Parkinson, Janice Taylor-Prebble, Sally Thurlow, Todd Tremeer, Jean-Michel Komarnicki and Helen Bajorek-MacDonald for the trek to Saranac Lake. I wish to extend warm personal thanks to all involved with this wonderful exchange. Heartfelt thanks and congratulations to Margaret Rodgers for bringing this project to life with such zeal and professionalism. To all thirteen artists involved, sincere thanks for sharing your work and passion, and for reminding us all that art knows no borders.

Panel discussion: Poole, Patterson, Seward, Davidson, Rodgers.

Crossing Borders I
Jul 19–Aug 16, 2015

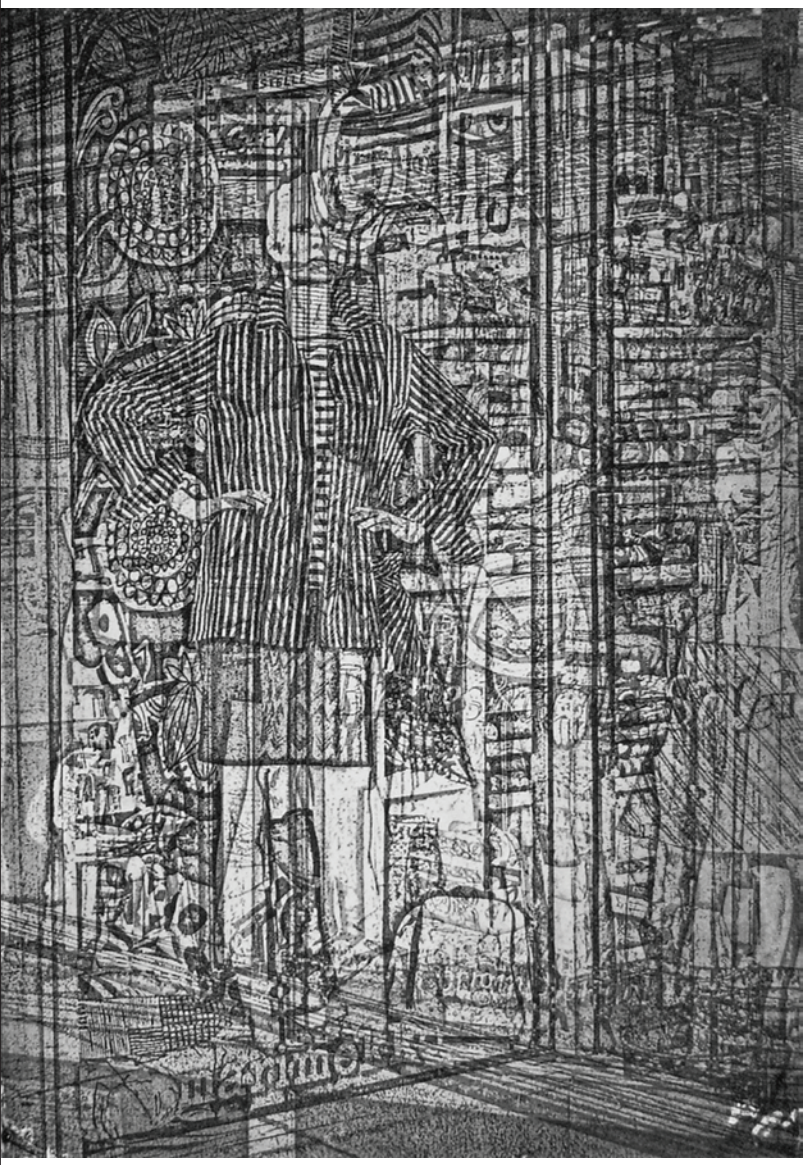
by **Margaret Rodgers**
The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington
Guest Curator

One might assume that an exhibition by artists from the heart of the Adirondacks would be content-rich with bears and other indigenous wildlife, trees, wooden framing, and all of the imagery associated with the region. But the artists from BluSeed have presented painting, prints and photo-based pieces that play against stereotype. The six artists who brought their works to VAC Clarington in 2015 connect more closely with BluSeed founder Carol Vossler's vision of developing an art centre concerned with practices of contemporary art.

Peter Seward's traditionally rendered aerial views of mountain and field reveal a variety of surveillance and military devices that depict 21C intrusions into 19C landscapes. In *Agrarian Matrix* drones fly above an agricultural landscape while *The Very Large Array* depicts a field of radio telescopes watching the night sky on the plains of the New Mexico desert. In *Tower of Babel,* the artist makes reference to 19C New York surveyor Verplanck Colvin who invented a transit device for measuring distances between mountain tops. Seward creates an exaggerated tower, the historical invention carefully rendered atop, while below, the mountainsides are peopled with numerous tiny figures, each one talking on a cell phone.

Peter Seward, *Agrarian Matrix,* 2015; oil on wooden panel; 16×20"

Valerie Patterson, *Underneath,* 2003; watercolour; 30×36"



Larry Poole, *Mannequins I,* 2009; non-toxic intaglio print; 10×14"

Equally intense are the highly refined watercolours of Valerie Patterson. A seemingly irradiated child flees from a mushroom cloud in *Contaminated* and in *Too Late* a magical fairy oversees a bleak Gettysburg battle scene. Patterson juxtaposes monochrome and colour effectively to express the gravity of her messages, but injects a note of levity in *Slow Service,* where a skeleton has been waiting way too long at the diner. The less explicit *Underneath* explodes with psychological resonance. Behind a finger-painted scrawl of rusty red colour presses a blackened face and hands, as if trying to escape the picture plane. It's a selfie, achieved by Patterson pressing her hands against a mixture of ketchup and peanut butter smeared across a transparent surface.

The VAC's north room offers viewers the opportunity for contemplative examination in the intaglio-type prints of Larry Poole and photo-constructions of Tim Fortune. In Poole's work, objects appear and narratives emerge through close examination, while from a distance, what is visible is an intricate grey-black surface, seemingly closer to text than image. In *SAM's Inopportune,* the composition of the print makes it appear that one is looking at careening vehicles through a broken windshield, taking the viewer into the violence of the scene itself. This piece, along with *Mannequin, Union Square* and *Houseboat environs* connect monochromatically while the artist uses colour effectively in *Graffiti I* and *II.*

Poole's use of photography resides companionably with Tim Fortune's beautifully designed *Echo Series I–6.* Here one might get a sense of location as the artist reconfigures images from nature into a series of

Tim Fortune, *Echo #2,* 2005; photo-based mixed media; 24×24"

Carol Vossler, *Warm Wishes 2–6,* 2015; handmade pulp painting with acrylic wash and stencilling

Karen Davidson, Installation view, 2015; vintage piano rolls, ink, stencilling; dimensions variable

geometrically stable shadowbox constructions. Well known for his luscious depictions of the North Country, his street front studio *Small Fortune* is a mainstay for Saranac's regular artwalks.

In the VAC loft are installations by Carol Vossler and Karen Davidson. Vossler's five handmade paper panels inhabit a charcoal-painted wall as if they always belonged in that space. There is deft fluidity in her pale pinks and mauves characteristic of her process, where acrylic colour is incorporated into the paper making itself. She has used a Nepalese method of screen drying on several to achieve a textured surface, while on others the pulp was pressed into a slightly smoother formation. The rough-hewn rafters echo the hands-on aspect of this work, while its verticality draws the eye further into the vaulting clerestory. When the building was a barley mill, there were labourers winnowing grain through two flights to the ground floor. One of them has carved his initials and the year 1937 onto a beam.

Karen Davidson's use of early 20C player piano rolls also calls up earlier times, and is equally suggestive of past ways of making, in this case, music. Looped over the rafters, each roll wafts gently in the summer breeze. The songs, with titles such as "You can't give your kisses to someone else" and "Please don't talk about me when I'm gone" are suggestive of the era when the mill was a working factory. Davidson has stencilled through the unspooled rolls onto rag paper to produce a series of abstract code-like configurations, each exhibited beside its original piano roll.

Clearly each artist brought some of BluSeed to the VAC, with much of the artworks actually produced in BluSeed studios. The Poole and Davidson pieces were produced in part at the print studio while Vossler's large scale pulp paintings were made in the papermaking facility. The Canadians are invited to explore this process in a special workshop there during *Crossing Borders 2*.

The sense of community, of collective action, and of director Vossler's strong vision and guiding hand was evident in the Clarington exhibition during 2015.

Guest Curator and essay writer, Margaret Rodgers brings her past connections to the VAC Clarington as well as BluSeed together in this project. Through the 1990s, as Director and Curator, she oversaw the development of the Clarington centre, and since 2000 has been involved with several exhibitions at BluSeed, exploring that community's history and art.

Installation, VAC Clarington

The Artists
Phase I

Karen Davidson grew up in the Chicago area in a family of professional artists, designers and wood workers, and graduated from Rhode Island School of Design. In 2014 she exhibited at Pouring Lights Studios in Malone, NY; Lake Placid Center for the Arts, and Bluseed Studios. For ten years she was a board member of LandEscapes, an artist residency on Mount Desert Island, Maine, that facilitated dialogue between artists and scientists. As a freelance graphic artist who specialized in exhibition catalogues and book design, she published artists books.

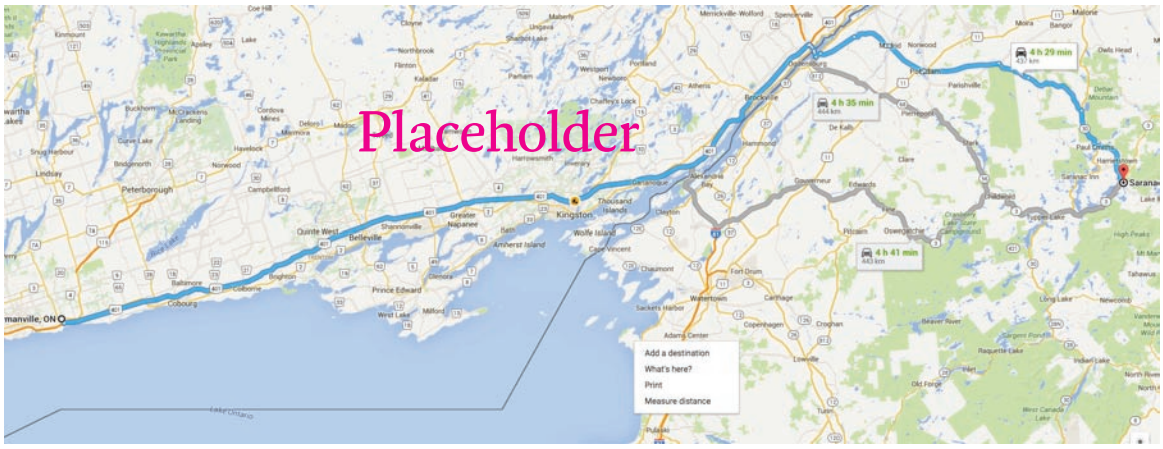
Tim Fortune's works have been shown at numerous galleries both nationally and internationally, in the American Embassy in Guatemala, as part of the Art in Embassies Program of the U.S. Department of State. He has won numerous awards including the prestigious Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting at the Society of the Four Arts, Palm Beach. Fortune's work is also represented in the permanent collection of the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake, New York. Currently Mr. Fortune is continuing his exploration of the unique qualities of the Adirondacks. *www.fortunestudio.com*

Valerie Patterson's work expresses "The beginning and ending of life, past vs. present, what lies underneath our facades, the danger always surrounding us." As the daughter of a teacher and Presbyterian Minister along the St Lawrence River in Ogdensburg, NY, she attributes her passion for social and political themes to the work and philosophies of both liberal-minded parents. *ValeriePatterson.com*

Larry Poole's prints have been included in numerous juried art exhibitions and recognized a number of times with awards. He has had one and two person exhibits at five different galleries as well as participating in a variety of group exhibitions. He was part of the Mazatlan, Mexico exchange as well as one with the MCP Printmakers in Monterey, CA. He is an alumnus of the New York Foundation for the Arts' 2011 MARK program and actively involved with BluSeed Studios where he does his printmaking. In addition he helped establish a local cooperative art gallery and is part of Saranac Lake ArtWorks. *www.printsbylarry.com*

Peter Seward sets our collective use of technology against the natural environment. His subject matter aligns him with the social realists while his formal painting techniques evoke the Hudson River School of Painting. Seward has exhibited in solo shows in New York State, and recently at Brandt Gallery in Cleveland, OH. Group shows have included BCB Gallery in Hudson, NY; Westport Arts Center, CT; Big Town Gallery, Rochester, VT; and 516 Arts, Albuquerque, NM. *www.peterseward.com*

Carol Vossler is founder of BluSeed Studios and a full time faculty member on North Country Community College. She has exhibited nationally and internationally and has curated many exhibitions over the past twenty years. Her newest body of work, inspired by two recent art exchanges with the artists from Mazatlan Mexico, includes traditional and contemporary printmaking/papermaking methods. The images themselves continue to question our place in the environment and how our encroachment reveals the impact of our presence, no matter how minimal.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Crossing Borders II
Apr 22–May 28, 2016

Introduction
by **Carol Vossler**
BluSeed Artistic Director
www.bluseedstudios.org

***Crossing Borders* is an international art exchange between BluSeed Studios, in Saranac Lake NY and VAC Clarington, Ontario.** This rendezvous we created provided a platform for the artists to showcase their artwork, share their knowledge and to learn from each other. Twelve artists from two different countries have come together for an experience that allows us as a group to embrace a greater exploration of art and cultural identity. By stretching boundaries we have in a mindful way changed our own topographical journey.

While at BluSeed, the VAC artists will take part in a papermaking & pulp painting workshop. We will share meals, stories and homes. BluSeed has now been involved in four exchanges since 2011: two with artists from Mazatlán Mexico and most recently artists from Monterey California, now VAC Clarington.

For all involved it has been the best way to transcend borders, challenge stereotypes and create awareness of the geography and demographics in each respective community. Participants live with local residents and shared an aesthetic that shows a contemporary approach to social, political questions and environmental issues that a "border" cannot contain.

BluSeed Studios provides space where artists can experiment, diverge, move ideas and aesthetics forward, share their diversity with the community. I invite all who come to Saranac Lake to come visit us. You will be most welcome.

Special thanks to James Campbell, Margaret Rodgers, the amazing staff and artists at VAC for their hospitality and generosity, and for the VAC for supporting this project.

BluSeed 2016

by **Margaret Rodgers**
The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington
Guest Curator

As the second phase of a dialogue that began with BluSeed Studios artists in the 2015 exhibition *Crossing Borders, Part II* sees an exhibition of Canadian artists from the VAC at BluSeed in Saranac Lake. This cross-border collaboration is intended to advance knowledge and promote public enjoyment of contemporary visual art and is inspired by the many parallels between the VAC and BluSeed, their historical and artistic influences and practices. Grass-roots endeavours by artists in their respective small towns have led to the development of each centre as both gallery and studio space, along with extensive community engagement.

The communities surrounding VAC Clarington and BluSeed in Saranac Lake NY has led to an exploration of their many similarities. They are both transformed from rural/industrial spaces that are not only exhibition venues but also studios for art making. BluSeed was a 7000-square-foot, neglected train warehouse, while the VAC had been a barley mill. Both are engaged in residencies for visiting artists, offer classes and other programming, and maintain close relationships to local institutions. Many of the artists involved in each site also contribute to post secondary art education in their nearby colleges.

The artworks presented contain elements which speak to the similarities and differences inherent in the exchange and articulate this relationship.

The artists travelling to BluSeed Studios include Chai Duncan, Liz Parkinson, Janice Taylor-Prebble, Sally Thurlow, Todd Tremeer, and The youmeus project (Jean-Michel Komarnicki and Helen Bajorek-MacDonald). In consideration of locale, each artist explores a variation on the natural world within a contemporary context. A project such as this requires a leap of faith and a generosity of spirit, in great supply among the participating artists.

Chai Duncan, *Untitled,* 2016; mixed media; 30×30"

The Artists
Phase II

Chai Duncan works in multiple media investigating territories arising from the junction and occasional collision of nature and culture. He is a collector of found landscapes and other representations of the natural world. His work reflects what happens when the forces of nature are imposed on human will and vice versa. He has exhibited his work across Canada and in the U.S. and worked in artist run centres and public art galleries in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario.

Liz Parkinson is interested in the collection, categorization and display of representations of the natural world as well as the language used to describe them: herbal, botanical, familiar, alien, native, naturalized, domestic, wild, lost, found, paradise, field... *lizparkinson.com*

Janice Taylor-Prebble works in mixed media, with a focus on printmaking and painting but has also created large sculpture installations. She is a licensed electrician, one of a growing number of women in the trade, and has employed her trade skills in her artworks. A feminist sensibility informs much of her work.

Liz Parkinson, *Fern* (cross section), 2015; relief on washi with beeswax and inscribed drawing; 12×12"

Janice Taylor-Prebble, *Golden Grid,* 2016; mixed media, 24ct gold leaf, acrylic on wood; 8×10"

Sally Thurlow, *Expectations,* 2015; cedar driftwood, cedar branches, acrylic paint, mixed media; 11H×50L×13W"

Todd Tremeer, *Roundhouse,* 2013; oil on canvas; 12×16"

The youmeus project, *Diapason Reach* (detail), 2016; archival pigment print; 12×20"

Sally Thurlow is a multi-disciplinary artist with practice based in sculpture and installation. For several years she has been exploring the dynamic range of figurative forms using driftwood, and other ephemera collected on beach walks. Questioning our cultural and environmental practises are a constant in her work. Currently, she is introducing paints, stains, and manufactured additions to her anthropomorphic figures, creating symbols for re-examination of the dominant ethos.

Todd Tremeer has recently been visiting model railroad clubs to paint "plein-air" their small-scale landscapes in the tradition of the Group of Seven. The best model railroads seemingly compress major geological features, industrial wastelands, pastoral and urban expanses into unnaturally confined spaces. His small, oil painted views reflect an imagined reality; invested with close observation, fantasy and play, in some manner similar to the work of Duncan, who also plays with ideas around imagined reality.

The youmeus project is a collaborative between **Jean-Michel Komarnicki** and **Helen Bajorek-MacDonald** whose current work is a photographic exploration of the present and past of industries in Durham Region: The Bowmanville Foundry, Tyrone Mills, Sklar, Malleable Iron, and others. The duo continues to work on their own crossing borders type of exploration dealing with familial ties to Ukraine, Poland, France, and Canada.

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