



Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art
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A Teacher's Guide

Plug In ICA presents an education program corresponding with our concurrent exhibitions: Ruth Cuthand: Back Talk and Andrea Carlson: Eat-All.

Ruth Cuthand: Backtalk

Back Talk is a comprehensive, mid-career retrospective of one of Saskatchewan's most significant contemporary artists. For over 30 years, this Saskatoon-based artist has been challenging mainstream perspectives on colonialism and the relationships between "settlers" and Natives in a practice marked by political invective, humour, and a deliberate crudeness of style. The exhibition brings together a comprehensive selection of artworks produced between 1983 and 2009. Her subjects include "white liberal" attitudes towards Aboriginal women, the Canadian response to the 1990 Oka crisis, Mormon-Native relations in Cardston, Alberta (the artist's childhood home), and more. Featured prominently in the exhibition is the complete suite of twelve award-winning beadworks, the Trading series, which depict, on a cellular level, the diseases that ravished First Nations upon European contact.

Andrea Carlson: Eat-All

Eat-All is Minneapolis-based artist Andrea Carlson's first solo exhibition in Canada. The exhibition showcases new and recent work whose references range from museum collections to exploitation films. Her artworks relate to the story of an object, and how objects are utilized as surrogates for cultural exchange. These ideas are expressed in selections from Carlson's ongoing series *VORE*. As its name suggests, *VORE* addresses cannibalism, employing the term as a metaphor for issues of cultural appropriation, consumption, and assimilation. Bringing together oil, acrylic, ink, color pencil, and graphite on paper, viewers will notice Carlson's penchant for creating loaded environments. Objects drawn from museum collections are depicted floating above seemingly pop-art inspired ranges while hints at Carlson's own Ojibwe-French-Scandinavian heritage linger in the background.

Prescribed learning outcomes:

Students will:

1. Read and interpret visual materials.
2. Communicate their ideas, experiences and feelings visually.
3. As part of the art workshop at Studio 393, students will create a large-scale collage that will become part of a larger installation while exploring the themes of consumption and cultural appropriation and humour as mechanism.

Assessment:

The teacher will decide on the appropriate assessment of this activity and communicate it to the class.

Web resources:

- The Mendel Art Gallery website for podcast interview with Cuthand:
www.mendel.ca
- See the ArtSask website, under the themes *Artist as Activist* and *Humour* for video interviews and discussion ideas:
www.artsask.ca
- Andrea Carlson's website:
<http://mikinaak.com/>
- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada - Historic Treaty Information Site:
<http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/al/hts/index-eng.asp>
- The Atlas of Canada: Historical Indian Treaties:
<http://atlas.nrcan.gc.ca/site/english/maps/historical/indiantreaties/historicaltreaties>
- Canada in the Making – Aboriginals: Treaties and Relations:
http://www.canadiana.org/citm/themes/aboriginals_e.html

Suggested classroom preparation (before coming to Plug In ICA):

- As a class, go over a selection of the provided sources.
- Answer the worksheet questions individually or as a group.
- In smaller groups discuss some of the themes you think will be important in the exhibition based on what you have read about the artists and the exhibitions. Discuss your expectations and thoughts on what the exhibitions and gallery will look and feel like.

Activity (at Plug In ICA):

- Tour of both Ruth Cuthand: Back Talk and Andrea Carlson: Eat-All exhibitions with Plug In ICA staff.
- Art workshop at Studio 393 (located in skywalk between Portage Place Mall and the Bay).

Below, please find more detailed explanations regarding the exhibitions, as well as additional biographical information that will provide context to better prepare students for the tour and workshop:

Ruth Cuthand: Back Talk

Curated by Jen Budney

Organized and circulated by co-produced by the Mendel Art Gallery and TRIBE, Inc.,
Saskatoon

Ruth Cuthand: Back Talk is a comprehensive, mid-career retrospective of one of Saskatchewan's most significant contemporary artists. For over 30 years, this Saskatoon-based artist has been challenging mainstream perspectives on colonialism and the relationships between "settlers" and Natives in a practice marked by political invective, humour, and a deliberate crudeness of style. The exhibition brings together a comprehensive selection of artworks produced between 1983 and 2009. Her subjects include "white liberal" attitudes towards Aboriginal women, the Canadian response to the 1990 Oka crisis, Mormon-Native relations in Cardston, Alberta (the artist's childhood home), and more. Featured prominently in the exhibition is the complete suite of twelve award-winning beadworks, the Trading series, which depict, on a cellular level, the diseases that ravished First Nations upon European contact. In 2009, the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina received the prestigious York Wilson Endowment Award to purchase six of the beadworks; the Mendel Art Gallery owns another three.

About the Artist

Ruth Cuthand was born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, in 1954, and is of Plains Cree and Scottish ancestry. Her works "talk back" to mainstream media and colonial society, addressing the frictions between cultures, the failures of representation, and the political uses of anger in Canada. As an artist, teacher, and cultural activist, Cuthand has been extremely influential for other artists in Saskatchewan, and contemporary Aboriginal artists across Canada. She graduated from the University of Saskatchewan with both a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and a Master of Fine Arts degree. In 1990, she had the first solo show of her career at the MacKenzie Art Gallery. Her solo exhibition, *Location/Dislocation*, was held at the Mendel Art Gallery in 1993. Until recent budget cuts to the First Nations University of Canada, Cuthand taught Art and Art History at the Saskatoon Campus.

Andrea Carlson: Eat All

Curated by Jenny Western

Organized by Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art

Minneapolis-based artist Andrea Carlson's upcoming exhibition Eat-All at Plug In ICA will showcase her new and recent work including the massive ten by fifteen feet piece *Ink Babel*. As Carlson explains, "Although rendered in ink, the repetition of the imagery is inspired by the physicality of film sequencing." *Ink Babel's* sixty overlapping paper panels present ten parallel seascapes referencing the mythic Tower of Babel. Carlson has long looked to film and movie culture for artistic inspiration and *Ink Babel* takes her practice a step further by playing with the tropes of cinematic technique and asking the viewer to operate as the viewfinder. Within the large work audiences will find a "zoom-in" effect on a depicted pig as well as a "deep focus" view of one of the work's towers.

Exhibited alongside *Ink Babel* will be selections from Carlson's ongoing series *VORE*. As its name suggests *VORE* addresses cannibalism, employing the term as a metaphor for issues of cultural appropriation, consumption, and assimilation. Bringing together oil, acrylic, ink, color pencil, and graphite on paper, viewers will again notice Carlson's penchant for creating loaded environments. Objects drawn from museum collections are depicted floating above seemingly op-art inspired ranges while hints at Carlson's own Ojibwe-French-Scandinavian heritage linger in the background. Texts such as "Apocalypse Domani" and "Eaten Alive" are incorporated and create, as Carlson puts it, the appearance of movie posters designed by someone who has not yet seen the film.

VORE revolves around storytelling and narrative as a means of conveying power and authority. The series' two main source of inspiration come from public collections and exploitation films, an incongruous pair perhaps but one where both platforms present images and symbols influential to the wider concepts of culture. By aligning the two, Carlson imagines museums as not only a primary cultural storyteller but also as a devourer of cultural materials. In her own words Carlson muses that *VORE*, "depicts a grand buffet of this creature, a buffet of cultural detritus, holy and symbolic, washed up on the shore.

About the Artist

Andrea Carlson lives and works in Minneapolis. In 2003 she earned a BA from the University of Minnesota and an MFA from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 2005. Her work has exhibited widely while gaining support through several fellowships including the Minnesota State Arts Board (2006) and McKnight/MCAD Foundation Fellowship (2007-08). Carlson was a participant in Plug In ICA's Summer Institute in 2010.

Worksheet:

Respond to each of the following questions with *at least* three sentences:

1. Canada is considered to be a cultural mosaic. What is your heritage, and where does your family originally come from?
2. Both Ruth Cuthand and Andrea Carlson address the idea of family history in their work. Do you identify with a family heritage that upholds specific traditions? These could include storytelling, crafts, food, dress, etc. If yes, describe.
3. Ruth and Andrea both address issues of racism in Canada towards First Nations peoples in their work. How does racism keep people apart? What are the effects?
4. If you were to create a portrait of Canada, what would it look like? Would it include elements of Canadian history, stereotypes, or personal memories? Would it be positive or negative?