



The Garden of Inconsistent Realities (still), 2010. Video. Courtesy of the artist.

Joe Bérubé
The Garden of Inconsistent Realities

An interest in maps and their various visual methodologies, especially those that seek to map movement, led Joe Bérubé to his own painted innovations for handling the visual perception of space. Bérubé's work is the result of trying to unravel the compressed and totalizing public character that maps propose. His concern is with that which escapes the mapping process – the ineffable quality of being in space, a constantly shifting passage vibrating at the surface.

The islands and land masses that once inhabited his canvasses have gone the way of a Fata Morgana¹ as proposed by his work *The Garden of Inconsistent Realities* (2010). In this fixed frame video of a found garden built on Wreck Beach² resembling a buried sleeping body (or a grave), the composition is occasionally interrupted by a hand holding up a triangular shaped kaleidoscope,³ thus briefly fracturing and partializing the view. Foiling representation through gravitational shifts in perspective, Bérubé addresses the tension between the fixity of that which is seen and controlled and that which is unmappable/unnamed. Michel de Certeau explores this very tension at the beginning of his essay "Walking in the City." Looking down on New York City from atop the World Trade Center, he writes, "It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a gnostic and scopic drive; the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more."⁴

Conversely, the walker inhabits the city blind to its whole, creating unmarked traversals. It is this ground-based illegibility for which Bérubé attempts to be a spatiotemporal barometer. The collection of objects in Bérubé's studio play with concepts of surface and structure, often implying motion by dint of their recline. A large, pinkish canvas, *Phantom Island* (2011), leans against the wall on a short two-legged stand. The painting seems momentarily reposed, but threatens to get up and walk away. It shares the same physical gesture as the broom in the corner of the room, as well as the long, narrow, iceberg-like sculpture, *Untitled (Iceberg)* (2011), held up by a tuning fork-like metal stand. Gradient painted sticks in *Untitled (Perspectives in Parallel)* (2011) rest in packs of twos and threes or more, along the wall.

The painted gradient is itself motion; as each ginger-pink tone of *Phantom Island's* passage shifts they leave behind traces of their own making. The painting is responsive to the changing light that hits the buildings seen from Bérubé's studio. There is also the story of Bérubé and a friend who tans easily at Wreck Beach. As the day progresses she rolls up her pants in half-hour increments and, like a human memory of a sundial, creates a gradient pattern on her skin.

Embedded in the gradient surface of the canvas and the sticks is the act of painting itself, the duration of the studio. The sticks are responsive to other instances, people or places in Bérubé's encounters with the world. Through their motility - the manner in which they solicit one to hold them - as either objects of rite and play, or support and extension of the human body, or even as transition between bodies as batons, they speak of the porousness of the studio, the coming and going of the world and the self. The studio itself becomes something of a gradient, a phantom island, transforming endosmotically⁵ with every encounter.

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1 A complex optical illusion and form of mirage. Fata Morgana is also the title of a 1969 Walter Herzog (self-proclaimed) science fiction film which features Lotte Eisner's voice narrating the Mayan Creation/Destruction Myth (*Popol Vuh*) over long shots of desert landscape.

2 A clothing optional beach that fringes the northwest corner of the University of British Columbia.

3 The lens of a kaleidoscope with an open viewer.

4 Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988), 92.

5 In *Time and Free Will* (1889), Henri Bergson uses the scientific term endosmosis to describe the fluid mitigating relationship between the fundamental self and the extended self in homogenous space (self in the world). In research notes compiled by art historian Michael Trevor Coughlin (2010) and forwarded to me through personal correspondence, he describes it as "something that has no beginning or end, but just continuous to change, like the ocean's tides, which rise and fall but never stops in between."