

The Encampment

Version 2012

A Thomas+Guinevere creation



Figure 1: Scotiabank Nuit Blanche, Toronto 2006 (history of mental health from 1870-1940, curated by Clara Hargittay (photo-Miklos Legrady.)

Artists: Thom Sokoloski + Jenny Anne McCowan (www.thomasandguinevere.com)
Producer: Sherrie Johnson Productions
Date: June 8th to June 24th, 2012
Where: The grounds of the Fort York National Historic Site, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

The Encampment (Toronto Version 2012) has been commissioned by Luminato, Toronto Festival of Arts and Creativity and City of Toronto, for the War of 1812 Commemoration.



DESCRIPTION:

The Encampment is a large-scale public participatory installation that proposes the archaeological encampment as its metaphor. A dig for artifacts is replaced by a dig into the collective memory of a public space and its history.

It is created over a three-month artistic process in which the artists, Thom Sokoloski and Jenny-Anne McCowan, work with collaborators selected from a public call for participation. Like archaeologists, they will commit to “getting their hands dirty” in unearthing and transposing the stories of a particular history into a massive experiential expression.

Presented at sunset, the public embarks on a nocturnal journey to explore the illuminated tents. Within each is an assemblage of metaphorical artifacts, rendered to evoke the story from which it was distilled. The entire process represents a fragile yet powerful glimpse into how society understands and interprets its past through a Renaissance-inspired creative collaboration.

What distinguishes The Encampment from most conceptual and relational art practices is the artists’ insistence on the primacy of the visual and aesthetic impact of the work. Though socially and historically relevant, interactive and truly public through participation, the artwork also creates an optical artwork on a grand-scale. From afar the massive assemblage of tents creates a glowing sculptural form, while up close the work offers accessibility into an experiential and visceral intimacy with content.

The intended effect of the artwork is that of a contemporary *gesamtkunstwerk*, an artwork that creates a total experiential environment of space, light, sound, form and story.

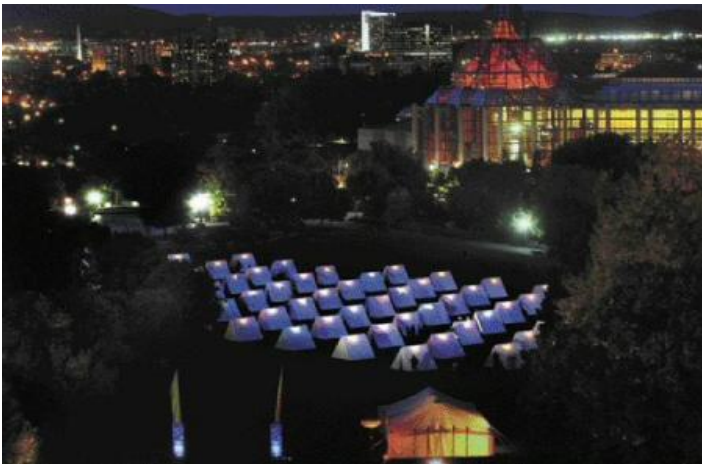


Figure 2: Ottawa 2008 (history of intellectual disability in Canada)



Figure 3: New York City (history of quarantine on Roosevelt Island)

CONTENT:

At its inaugural presentation, commissioned by Scotiabank’s Nuit Blanche 2006 in Toronto, The Encampment looked at the history of mental health on Queen St. West between 1870 and 1940 and was set up in the gully of

Trinity Bellwoods Park. 68-tents were set-up referencing the controversial Bill-68 passed by the Ontario Parliament in regards to treatment of mental health.

In 2007, The Encampment was presented in New York City in partnership with Open House New York on the southern tip of Roosevelt Island opposite the United Nations and looked at the island's history of quarantine from 1800 to 1970. 100-tents were set-up referencing the 100 beds that were available in the existing historic, yet abandoned, small-pox hospital.

In 2008, it was presented in Ottawa in partnership with the Canadian Association for Community Living and the National Capital Commission, looking at the history of intellectual disability from 1820 to 2008. 70-tents were set-up referencing the established IQ under which an individual is considered intellectually disabled.

For 2012, The Encampment will look at the civilian history of the War of 1812. 200-tents, referencing the bicentennial of the War of 1812, will be set up on the grounds of the Fort York National Historic Site.



Figure 4: Tent installation created with found materials from the ruins of an institute in Vancouver (Ottawa).



Figure 5: Shadows from tents with UN in background (NYC).

PROCESS:

On January 17, 2012, a Call for Public Participation will go out to invite the public to participate in the creation of The Encampment as either Creative or Production Collaborators. The outreach campaign will be undertaken in and around Toronto, the regions along the north shore of Lake Ontario, Southern Georgian Bay, Sault Ste. Marie/ Algoma, Stoney Creek and Niagara, as well as with the Mississauga First Nation and Six Nations.



Figure 6: Installation Creation Workshop

The selected Creative Collaborators will research a collection of stories representing the diverse peoples inhabiting Canada at the time. They will include individual stories of love, loss, survival and patriotism as well as those of collaboration, deception and betrayal.

A series of Installation Creation Workshops will follow in which the artists will work with the collaborators to transpose the selected stories into visual expressions of metaphorical artifacts to be installed within each tent.

As an actor digs deep within him or herself to reveal traces and emblems of similarities and differences with a character in relation to a dramatic narrative they are to represent, each Creative Collaborator is also asked to dig deep within the history of their story's characters to do the same. With the actor, it is externalized in their physical being and in the case of the Creative Collaborator, through their visual expression within each tent as a visceral sensation of absence and presence.

The creative process requires a time commitment by each collaborator since their acknowledgement of the proposed process in these workshops is paramount to the success of the artwork. The thoughts, experiences, insight, interest and enthusiasm each participant brings and shares with the group is the foundation of the creative energy and exchange necessary to complete the final experience of this large-scale artwork. In as much as the final realization of the artwork re-imagines a community of the past, the creative process and exchange proposed in this work seeks to re-imagine a creative and collaborative community in the present.

THOMAS+GUINEVERE

Coming together with a common interest in site-specific work, the interrelationships between art and public, and their extensive experience in creating multi-disciplinary performance and image-based work, Thom Sokoloski and Jenny-Anne McCowan began their creation studio Thomas+Guinevere.

This past year they were in residence in the Mapoon, Queensland, Australia for three weeks. They collaborated with the Aboriginal Rangers, Ghost Nets Australia and artists from Cape York and Southern Australia to integrate ghost nets and abandoned drift nets as the history and material into their newest large-scale installation, *The Ghost Net*, which examines the effects of marine debris on the environment and society as an experiential large-scale trans-national artwork.

THOM SOKOLOSKI

Thom trained in New York City at Ellen Stewart's LaMama ETC, Edward Hawkins Dance, and the Open Theatre. In Paris, he studied at L'École Jacques Lecoq and LaMama de Paris. Returning to Toronto, he became one of the original founders of Autumn Leaf Performance, The Theatre Centre and the Native Theatre School. His earlier works included an acclaimed version of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* at the Avignon Off-Festival, *Kamikaze* at Café de la Danse in Paris, and the punk musical *Sid's Kids* inside Toronto's legendary Voodoo Club. After meeting composer and visionary R. Murray Schafer in the mid-eighties, Thom directed his massive operatic works, including *RA*, at the Ontario Science Centre and Holland Festival, *Hermes Trismegistos* at the Liège Festival and inside Union Station for Toronto's World Stage '92, and *Requiems for the Party Girl* at Harbourfront.

He produced Ahmed Hassan's *14 Remembered* and Michael Nyman & Band at Massey Hall, the Master Musicians of Jajouka at Convocation Hall, and the Sonic Boom series of contemporary opera and music. In co-production with the Banff Centre, Opéra de Montréal, and Musica Festival in Strasbourg, he produced an international tour of Claude Vivier's opera *Kopernikus*. His own works include the opera *Electric Flesh* with composer Wend Bartley, presented at the Opéra de Lyon, the libretto for *Nosferatu* for the Canadian Opera Company, and *Anxiety of Immortality* at the Royal Ontario Museum. His final foray into the performing arts was *Kafka in Love*, a water-opera staged inside Hart House swimming pool with synchronized swimmers and a video-sound installation for the World Stage Festival '03. Following this, he programmed the McLuhan Festival of the Future '04 and curated *Interactive '05* for the Toronto International Art Fair with a focus on interactive media art in public spaces.

In 2006, he received his first major visual arts commission and conceived *Confinement of the Intellect* for Toronto's *Nuit Blanche*. Partnering with Jenny-Anne McCowan (Thomas+Guinevere), he presented versions of the artwork, re-titled *The Encampment*, on Roosevelt Island in New York City and Major's Hill Park in Ottawa. Thom also curated *Zone A* for Toronto's *Nuit Blanche* 2009, co-created *The River Peace* for *Nuit Blanche* 2010 with McCowan and curated *The Distillery District* for *Nuit Blanche* 2011. More info on past and recent works can be found at www.thomsokoloski.com.

JENNY-ANNE MCCOWAN:

After eight years performing as a soloist and participating in large scale mass routines around the world in rhythmic gymnastics, Jenny-Anne began her career in dance and choreography in 1993 while pursuing a degree in Psychology and Political Science. Her first piece of choreography was selected to represent McMaster at the Canadian University Dance Festival, after which she went on to work in London, Berlin, Lyon, Miami, and New York.

In 2002, Jenny-Anne received her Master's Degree from York University where she developed her thesis on the 'Rave' phenomenon. Inspired by the dancing and intrigued by the skill and lack of formal training that the dancers possessed, she argued that expressive movement was the catalyst for the continuation of the rave subculture. It was here that she began to develop her aesthetic of 'public momentum.' In 2004, Jenny-Anne joined the not-for-profit group Literacy Through Hip Hop and designed a curriculum for urban youth that blends hip-hop and literacy, now being used across Canada, the U.S., and South America. In 2006, inspired to create an event to support a friend who suffered a severe spinal cord injury, she produced and directed 'Raise' which became the first major project to explore her aesthetic of public momentum through developing situations that would allow for individual and improvisational expression within the context and confines of a larger whole. She motivated over 50 volunteer performers from dance, circus, music, and visual arts, as well as 25 support staff to participate. In 2009, Jenny-Anne created Bert and Tony's Block Party for Toronto's *Nuit Blanche* that called upon the history of Toronto's dance competitions and invited the public to participate in the work's final creation. In 2009 Jenny choreographed the site specific performance installation *La Nuit Chagall and Constance Mayer*, a movement solo. Since 2006, Jenny-Anne has partnered with Thom Sokoloski as the choreographer of *The Royal Flush*, *Confinement of the Intellect* in Toronto, *The Encampment* in New York and in Ottawa, and *The River Peace*.