

Ann Beam and Carl Beam:
Spaces for Reading

Annotated Bibliography and Conversation
on Ann Beam and Carl Beam

JAN 15 2019 - JUN 20 2019

SFU GALLERY

Selected and Annotated by Mackenzie Ground

Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1997)

The collage work of Ann Beam and Carl Beam reminds me of the written collage-like work in *One Way Street*. To me, these works have a dream-like quality to them and ask what our relationship is to the images and commodities of the world.

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1962)

Carl Beam was known to have an interest in and be influenced by Heidegger's book, whose ontological questions echo in Carl and Ann Beam's work.

Liz Howard, *Infinite Citizen of the Shaking Tent* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2015)

When I looked at Ann Beam's work, I was reminded of Liz Howard's work. I see an engagement with the scientific, nature, cosmos, and human impact in both.

Thomas King, "You're Not the Indian I Had in Mind" in *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Inc., 2003), 31-60.

In this chapter, Thomas King discusses the work of Edward S. Curtis, whose work appears collaged in Carl Beam's work. Both seem to be asking similar questions of Curtis' work.

Scott N. Momaday, *In the Bear's House* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010)

This book of poetry and illustrations has a special place in my heart, and I associate Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday with Ann Beam's and Carl Beam's time in New Mexico.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Pedagogy of Buddhism" in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, ed. Michèle Aina Barale et. al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 153-181.

Buddhism impacted Ann Beam's and Carl Beam's lives, and Eve Sedgwick considers the relationship between Western thought and Buddhism and the notions of what learning and knowing can mean.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2013)

The work of Anishinaabe Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Carl Beam have me reflecting on Indigenous identity and the practice of being. I often find myself reflecting on their differing ideas of what being Anishinaabe or Ojibway means to them.

Jeffrey Veregge, “Journeys” in *Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection*, vol. 2, ed. Hope Nicolson (Toronto: Alternate History Comics Inc., 2017), 130-142.

The colours and the cosmos in Ann Beam’s work kept reminding me of this comic. It creates an interesting connection for me between the Beams’ work and the Suquamish language. Plus, comics and Indigenous Futurism. Need I say more?

Richard Wagamese, *For Joshua* (Toronto: Penguin Random House Canada, 2003)

I find Ojibway writer Richard Wagamese’s work is kind and giving to his reader when he writes about learning Ojibway teachings, which may help in approaching Carl Beam’s work.

Selected and Annotated by Sandra Semchuk

Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill and Sophie McCall, eds., *Land We Are, The Artists and Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2015)

Land We Are, The Artists and Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation models cross cultural engagement and dialogue in rich original ways.

Claudette Lauzon, *Motherlines: Works on Paper* by Ann Beam (Ottawa: Carleton University, 2003)

Claudette Lauzon traces the complex set of representations and roles that characterize womanhood and motherhood in Ann Beam's series *Motherlines*.

Arthur Manuel and Grand Chief Ronald M. Derrickson, *Unsettling Canada: A National Wake-Up Call* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2015)

Unsettling Canada: A National Wake-Up Call provides leadership in the recognition of First Nations Governance as a foundation for reconciliation.

Ashok Mathur, Mike DeGagné and Jonathan Dewar, *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2011)

Like the entry above, *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity* models cross cultural engagement and dialogue in rich original ways.

Sylvia McAdam (Saysewahum), *Nationhood Interrupted: Revitalizing nēhiyaw Legal Systems* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd., 2015)

Like the entry above, *Nationhood Interrupted: Revitalizing nēhiyaw Legal Systems* provides leadership in the recognition of First Nations Governance as a foundation for reconciliation.

Selected and Annotated by Richard Hill

Claude A Bouchard and Ann Beam, *Breaking the Rules: Carl Beam, RCA, 1943-2005* (Ottawa: Galerie d'art Vincent, 2006)

Published by a commercial gallery located in the Chateau Laurier Hotel in Ottawa, this small catalogue is notable primarily for its many fine reproductions of Beam's later works.

Virginia M Eichhorn, *It's All Relative: Carl Beam, Ann Beam, Among Migwans Beam* (Peterborough: Art Gallery Peterborough, 2005)

A good opportunity to see the relationship between the Beam family as artists.

John K. Grande, "Carl Beam: Dissolving Time" in *Balance: Art and Nature* (Montréal: Black Rose, 2004), 178-188.

An essay following Beam's career up to the mid 1990s.

Greg A. Hill, *Carl Beam: The Poetics of Being* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2010)

Catalogue for a major posthumous retrospective by the National Gallery of Canada, including important essays, a chronology of the artist's life and useful bibliography.

Tom Hill and Karen Duffek, *Beyond History* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1989)

Of particular local interest because this was the Vancouver Art Gallery's first major survey of contemporary Indigenous art, during a period when Beam was a key figure.

Elizabeth McLuhan and Carl Beam, *Altered Egos: The Multimedia Work of Carl Beam* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay National Exhibition Centre and Centre for Indian Art, 1984)

A very early, prescient and brilliant examination of the artist's career to this point. Difficult to find, but well worth the effort.

Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin, eds. *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives* (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992)

Indigena and *Land, Spirit, Power* (see below) were both major survey exhibitions mounted by Canada's two most prominent national museums that ad-

dressed contemporary Indigenous art in a sustained and serious way for the first time. Beam was prominently featured in each exhibition.

Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle, and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992)

See above.

James Patten, *Living in Mother Earth* (London: London Regional Art and Historical Museums, 1993)

A modestly sized, but interesting catalogue regarding the construction of the Beam family's adobe home on Manitoulin Island.

Richard Rhodes, *Carl Beam, the Columbus Boat* (Toronto: The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, 1992)

Catalogue for a major exhibition at the Power Plant in Toronto. Features many important works related to the theme of "burying the ruler," and the artist's experiences in residential school. The essay provides close analysis of the works and genuine insight into how they generate meaning.

Jackson W. Rushing, *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century: Makers, Meanings, Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999)

This anthology of essays from the end of the last century features Beam's influential painting *The North American Iceberg* on the cover and his work and ideas are discussed or noted by a number of authors within.

Allan J. Ryan, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999)

Beam's ideas and art are central to Ryan's book-length study of the Trickster in contemporary Indigenous art.

Shelagh Young and Carl Beam, "The Columbus Project Phase III" in *Sub Rosa*, vol.1, Winter (Peterborough: Artspace, 1992)

Newsprint publication by Artspace in Peterborough, featuring a long and very interesting interview with Carl Beam related to his exhibition there in 1992.

Sandra Semchuk and Richard Hill in conversation about Ann Beam and Carl Beam

Sandra Semchuk: There is a piece that's in the show at SFU Gallery where there is a circle of men who are shooting their arrows upwards. Above the image is an image of a feather. It's one that Carl did. It really intrigues me because it makes me think of the images that Ann made of solar flares and this small bit of blue (in her title she refers to that small piece of blue). It seems like I move into a kind of inquiry that's open ended [when I look at these works], and I can't in any way say what's happening, but it's in that state of free fall, or getting lost, in terms of time and place that seems to be part of the relationship that the two of them have. There's an ongoing inquiry between spirituality, the present and the past. It's a complex ontology.

Richard Hill: One of the things that has interested me in Carl Beam's work for a long time—and I think it relates to this question of what that work is in dialogue with, including within his family—is that there is an extraordinary sense of his groundedness in Anishinaabe culture. From that position of confidence he is able to extend himself and be open to all sorts of things. I only met Carl once or twice, but the sense I've always had about him is that he doesn't turn off being an artist at any time. The process through which he works is the process through which he lives, through which he frames the world, and I think you can see that in the art. I saw it just the few times that I talked to him, through his way of making connections between things. In the work there's this visual field into which might enter anything. That new element will be in dialogue, in a network that is constantly rearranging itself. To me that's the aesthetic core. That work is about that receptiveness and willingness to take things in and examine them in a particular context and then take something else and now suddenly these two things are related and then there's a third thing that makes us think again about each component. So, the fact that his work can then sit in relation to Ann's; it seems perfectly within the logic of his practice and approach to living.

SS: Do you think that in their thinking they provide counter situations for one another? That is to say, as you put another object into that space it's giving us another way to come in, at the same issue, or questions, or possible field of inquiry. As two people who are working together they are that for each other in themselves.

RH: Absolutely. To me this gets to something, and I wish I knew Ann better myself to say how those two things sat together, but one of the things we're talking about is nonlinearity and at the time Carl was working that was a post-modern buzzword, but for Carl Beam it was something that was much deeper. I remember meeting him at the ceramics museum where he and Ann were doing

a residency together. They had worked in ceramics before; it was a logical fit. I went to one of the public presentations that he gave, and he started talking and talking and it seemed as though he kept getting further and further from the point, and people started looking at him and thinking what's up with this guy? He just followed the conversation around and right at the end it all connected and you saw that this constellation of things that didn't seem related at first had all clicked together. You could see what he was trying to tell you and it was very powerful. It was obvious at that point that this is how he thinks. It wasn't, "I'm going to try to be nonlinear." It was "I am nonlinear. This is how things all sit together for me." You can see in that structure how things are in relationship to each other. But it's not one where you can go from point to point and see the trajectory. Perhaps on another day something else might come in and all the connections might be rearranged. I'm sure when they were working together that exchange had to happen. I can't see how it could not have. Some artists have practices where they could not do that, where they have a singular vision and focus, but I think with his practice it was absolutely open to that.

I think it's important to understand the kind of subject matter that was coming into his work. There was no question that he was Anishinaabe, that he knew where he was from, and at the same time he was interested in the rest of the world. He didn't see that taking anything away from him. I think he saw that as an ethical responsibility to be engaged with all those things such as global environmental issues and political issues. They were real concerns of his and they came together through collage, that was the structure he provided.

SS: There is a fearlessness that I see in both of their works that tackle some of those difficult issues, challenging our thinking around systems and the way we come to measure the world or measure ourselves. I'm wondering about the nature of fearlessness, or the nature of how one can be in a place of courage to confront oneself. I think that he really was very self-critical. The work was first of all done for himself, as her work was done for herself, but how do you understand his and her ability to have that courage to face structures that were so destructive and that one was caught within, and to find alternate places to stand or to look at notions of reality that could open up the world again in some way.

RH: I'm not good on courage because I'm a coward myself and I feel that in a way—I'm sort of joking, but I'm sort of not—it was the work of people like them who opened up a space for people like me. Carl Beam was a generation or two

older than me, and I saw people like him, people like my mother who, to paraphrase Rebecca Belmore, “rose to the occasion” and I don’t know how they did that, honestly. It’s very easy to look back on it now and to see those agendas that have risen out of those gestures and say, “Oh, of course I would’ve been heroic and resisted and done all these things,” but I don’t know if I would’ve or not. I think there are certain people that we just needed so badly and they showed up, and I think Carl Beam is one of those people.

There was a moment when all of those things that were really hard to frame and to talk about, a moment where it was very easy to fall into a lot of different traps around identity. The fact that he remained so open, for example, was a really important and wise thing. It was very easy to simply say, Western culture came and did this and therefore I’m going to put up a wall around myself or my situation, but that was not what he did. And no doubt it played out in the intimacy he had with his wife. He had an openness in the way he was able to take on questions of race politics and the categorization and policing of peoples identities that were the apparatus of colonialism. It’s very easy to resist them by saying, “We don’t want you policing our identity. We’ll police it,” when maybe the problem is too much policing of identities, period.

The humour he had was always sharp, which also gave it room to move. I think all those things created a space where anything could happen, where you could draw on traditional knowledge and spirituality and at the same time you could connect it to anything that was going on. One of the ways their work is not linear is temporally, because all of the things that are coming into and out of presence from different times. I think that’s what’s really strong in both their work; there’s this moment where you can focus on something, and then there’s always threat that it might disappear out of focus, before we’re ready for it to go. Or it might never be able to reach the surface, so there’s a sense in a lot of those works where there’s a struggle to be visible, to be on the surface which I think is really interesting. There’s a really interesting temporality there, where the historical sits right alongside the contemporary moment, right alongside some other question and I’ve always felt that is what our experience of history is always like; it’s personal, but it’s also these meta-narratives, and we don’t keep it in our head all together all at once. We pick something and we ruminate on it and then we go somewhere else, but in those things we begin to see connections and the meaning of those histories become evident to us in that way. I think that’s what’s going on through the work all the time.

SS: I'm looking at this piece by Ann and it has a single photograph that looks like it was made in the evening. It shows the adobe bricks that she and Carl have made in this huge ceramic project which is their home and their studio, and there is some blue sky in the background with some yellow spots and it goes to pink on one side. It's in a field that looks like it's adobe coloured clay and the shapes that are within it point towards the thunderbird and that specificity of that power arches over all of North America. I see this as being in dialogue, intimately with Carl. Do you have any thoughts about this piece?

RH: This is actually one that I like quite a lot and I always recognize that hour glass shape. It's a kind of iconic symbol of the thunder, where the upper triangle of the top part of the hourglass is the chest and the bottom triangle is the tail and then you have feathers going out and usually you have the head turned in profile. One of the things that you'll see in historical objects is that, because that image was so ubiquitous for thousands of years, people would often put a very abstract hourglass shape on an object and everyone would know immediately, oh, that's a thunderbird. It is like a cross; you see the cross and you don't have to see a representational image of Jesus on the cross, just the two lines, because it has become an iconic symbol. The same thing goes for the hour glass shape.

In Anishinaabe language the thunder is usually referred to in kinship terms as a grandfather, so there's often this very benevolent relationship between the thunders, as these supernatural beings of the sky world, and Anishinaabe individuals and communities. So to represent that figure over top of this, traditionally if you're going to use that kind image you would've had a vision or a dream that would authorize that. I don't know the case for this particular image, but it's interesting to me that Ann is embedded in that cultural world to the extent that she understands that imagery and is able to use it convincingly. I love those little flecks of gold that might be stars, that have a precious quality as well. It might also be rain, which would be something you'd associate with the presence of thunders.

SS: They often go off planet. In this body of work there's a lot of images of spheres.

RH: And there's all these dimensions of the sky world as well as the underworld. You can think of storms and shelters in terms of those adobe bricks, and the blessing of the thunder alongside of that.

SS: Lovely, because this is an image of them building their home.

RH: Yeah, it's so personal. But this is what I think is so fascinating having looked at the history of Anishinaabe art: the thunder. I just spoke about the iconic aspect, which is the collectively shared aspect, but there is always something personal as well, unless the work was made simply for sale outside the community. The personal aspect is almost always registered in an idiosyncratic way around the image, whatever it might be. You can look at them and know immediately that it is a thunder because of the hourglass, but it's always doing something that's a little different each time and usually that would be because there is something specific between that person and that thunder that's being represented. The individuality of that connection, whatever that special blessing was—dream or vision—is their reference to a particularity around it. That kind of intimacy that you're talking about, it's always there. Often people think about thunder images being used to decorate weapons, because people did use them that way, but you also see them on cradleboards and other things like that. In a way, this is a little like decorating a cradleboard, putting that kind of blessing on an object to protect your family, your house. That personal aspect I find really fascinating, that play between the iconic and the individual. Often people would keep it secret if it was really special to them. The personal meaning would be specific and private and the public meaning would be public.

SS: That's a really important statement. It also shows the cross assimilation that happens in a marriage too, doesn't it? James Nicholas and I did this piece together called *I am appropriating you (year?)* and there is an image of him looking down at his hand holding a rock, and my mouth is open. It ends with his leg up in triumph at the Landmark Hotel. That blending that happens when you love someone is really ...I like that notion of the deeply personal that you're speaking of and it's really sensitive to the integrity of the individual and a shared reality as they're building a home together.

RH: Those connections have been happening for hundreds of years and I'm the product of them. As important as it is to talk about settler cultures and Indigenous cultures it gets turned into such an identity politic it's almost as though we're staring at each other across this distance that doesn't actually exist in a lot of cases. It's almost as if we're at this moment of first contact with each other, which we're not. We're not in that situation, at least most of us aren't and we've had these intimacies for generations in different ways. A lot of the relationships have had problematic framing of colonial histories behind it but at the same time people develop real connections and real relationships, they have kids, their kids have kids; it's been generations now.

To keep that space of interaction open is really important right now because people are retreating to a siloed notion of who they are as an act of self-preservation or protection but I feel like the work that Carl and Ann did together, and even Carl's work on his own, speaks of a different kind of relationship and a different kind of space. To me, I don't mean to be reductive in the opposite direction, it's much more Indigenous to remain open in that way. I feel like it betrays all sorts of traditions of hospitality and ideas of personhood to hive us all off to separate categories. Maybe I'm being polemical but I do believe that the space of interaction and in-betweenness is somewhat in jeopardy right now. We're losing the language to talk about it properly because we've fallen into this other language of sovereignty and settler-Indigenous dichotomies which reflect on a political reality, but when you get to the level of individual people it becomes an identity politics that doesn't actually fit peoples real experiences.

SS: The work of Ann and Carl shows evidence of that kind of openness and in-between space, looking at women from India or Bangladesh in relationship to Ann's own relationship within the home. That sense of openness—with the Sanskrit text that Carl was interested in, or the breakdown of the way math was understood by Einstein, or thinking of philosophers that he or she was interested in—and ability to stay within the inquiry process seems to be what you're calling an open-inquiry process. This seems to be the basis of their relationship.

Biographies

Ann Beam works across media and has a BFA from State University of New York, Buffalo. Her work has been exhibited across Canada and the US. She manages the Neon Raven Art Gallery on Manitoulin Island, Ontario which features works by her late husband, artist Carl Beam and daughter Anong Migwans Beam, as well as her own work.

Carl Beam (1943-2005) was born in M'Chigeeng (West Bay) on Manitoulin Island, Ontario. He studied at Kootenay School of Art University of Victoria and University of Alberta for his MFA. His work has been the subject of numerous Canadian exhibitions, including a solo exhibition organized by the National Gallery of Canada in 2010 that toured across the country.

Mackenzie Ground is a writer from Enoch Cree Nation and Edmonton, Alberta. She is currently a PhD student in the Department of English at Simon Fraser University. Her writing has appeared in *Glass Buffalo* and *The Capilano Review*.

Sandra Semchuk is an artist based in Vancouver whose work is focused on photography and video. She taught at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Her work has been widely exhibited across Canada and the US. For 15 years she worked in collaboration with her late husband James Nicholas, a Rock Cree actor and orator, looking at Indigenous and non-Indigenous identity, and thinking about autobiography and the familial.

Richard William Hill is Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Studies at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. His column *Close Readings*, featuring extended reviews of contemporary Indigenous art, ran in *Fuse* and *C Magazine*. He also has an irregular column at canadianart.ca. He is currently on the editorial board of the journal *Third Text*.



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