

Artsnb Hosts Visiting Artists

The repetitive sound of a rotating lawn sprinkler spreads through an otherwise immobile scene of a grassy, walled-in yard. A sports net divides the yard. A tipped over plastic chair leans against one of the net's posts.

What goes on here? Tennis? Badminton? Who sits in the chair? A referee?

Suddenly, action: a peacock enters from the left and scurries by the net. It jumps to the top of a flower covered wall and, silhouetted by a lazy sky, doesn't hesitate before escaping the compound. Fade to black.

"The video art is my latest addition to my visual diaries," says artist Majra Waheed about the eerie reality portrayed in her moving vignette of the Middle Eastern scene her audience has just witnessed.

An organization called CPAF (Canadian Public Arts Funders) came to Fredericton this week to meet with the country's arts councils.

CPAF's website describes itself as a "network that unites," and to that end, this year, they invited artists from all over the country to tell funders about a "changing visual arts and craft landscape." Montreal based Waheed is one of them.

Artsnb, New Brunswick's arts council, brought artists attending the meeting to an "Artist Talk" at the Charlotte Street Arts Center.

Waheed showed the audience her art and explained its influences. Like the peacock in her art video, she spent her young life leaving one place for another.

"My work attempts to build my personal archives. I start with a non-fictional story and fictionalize it."

Born in Alberta, she left to spend her preteen years in Saudi Arabia in the walled headquarters of Saudi Aramco, where her father worked as a geologist.

At the age of 14 she left Saudi Arabia to attend boarding school in the United States. After finishing her BFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she finally returned to Canada and McGill University for her MA.

Waheed relates how she persistently tried for years to receive funding from Canadian arts organizations without success.

"After six years of rejection, I was finally funded, but I was funded by the South Asian Visual Arts Collective. It made me worry that I would be pigeon-holed as an Asian artist," she said.

That worry is behind her. The artist has since exhibited internationally including a solo exhibition in India, the country of her heritage. Most recently, she held her first solo exhibition in Canada at the Art Gallery of Windsor.

Steven Loft concluded the Artsnb event. He is a media artist, but he didn't come to the CPAF event to talk about his art.

He came to talk about his passion. He is a curator and scholar of Indigenous art and aesthetics.

Loft, who has Mohawk of the Six Nations heritage and spent two years as Curator-in-Residence for Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada, traced the struggle of Canada's aboriginal peoples to gain recognition for their work. He says the art world is closed-minded towards non-Western art.

"It was 1990 before the National Gallery finally held a solo exhibition for an aboriginal artist," Loft says.

By 2003, the National Gallery reopened its Canadian historical art exhibits with an integrated contribution of aboriginal art.

But Loft says the country has to move to embrace aboriginal art in additional, tangible ways.

"In the 22 pages of art and art history course descriptions in the University of Toronto's catalog, there is not one course taught in aboriginal art," Loft says.

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 No comments

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Steven Loft – photo by Scott Beneslinaabandan