



Blurry Canada, Alberta (a), 7 July 2010, en route from Kamloops to Edmonton, chromogenic photograph, 2010. Image courtesy of the artist.



Blurry Canada, Manitoba, 12 July 2010, en route from Winnipeg to Thunder Bay, chromogenic photograph, 2010. Image courtesy of the artist.

RISA HOROWITZ

Risa Horowitz has lived and worked in seven Canadian provinces as an artist, educator, writer, and gallery programmer. Her work has been exhibited across Canada in a variety of public galleries and artist-run-centres, as well as internationally in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the Ukraine. She is represented in Toronto by MKG127 Gallery. Horowitz has received numerous grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, several provincial funding bodies, the K.M. Hunter award for excellence in Visual Arts in 2006, as well as the SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship for her research in visual arts and practice-based scholarship. Horowitz's extended conceptual practice is contextualized by an interest in how visual and information systems define knowledge. Many of her works are motivated by questions having to do with space, time, and being as these are experienced through making and expressed visually through art. She has recently embarked upon the project of becoming an amateur astronomer and amateur astrophotographer in order to collect images and video of the planet Saturn.



Blurry Canada, Ontario (c), 14 July 2010, en route from Tobermorey to Toronto, chromogenic photograph, 2010. Image courtesy of the artist.



Two Canada Videos, video stills, 2010. Image courtesy of the artist.



Two Canada Videos, video stills, 2010. Image courtesy of the artist.



Blurry Canada Manitoba (b), 27 June 2010, en route from Winnipeg to Brandon, chromogenic photograph, 2010. Image courtesy of the artist.



Blurry Canada, Quebec (b), 14 June 2010, en route from Edmundston to Toronto, chromogenic photograph, 2010. Image courtesy of the artist.

BLURRY CANADA RISA HOROWITZ

CURATED BY NATALIA LEBEDINSKAIA
JUNE 21 – AUGUST 04, 2012

ART GALLERY OF SOUTHWESTERN MANITOBA
710 ROSSER AVENUE, UNIT 2
BRANDON, MANITOBA. R7A 0K9

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Many years ago as part of a high school project, Risa Horowitz created a hypothetical road trip with her best friend. They mapped out their itinerary, planned all the necessary stops, and worked out a budget. Following Horowitz’s professional training as an artist with a focus on photography, its history, and theory at York University, the two friends undertook a version of this trip. In a desire to document it, they would stop their car, Horowitz would take her camera and tripod and create neatly composed, technically rigorous, metered, and planned out images of the picturesque landscape along the way. Motivated by a desire to step away from the tradition of mastery and craftsmanship of the photographic arts, she began taking blurry photographs from the driver’s seat during her numerous road trips. Frequently traveling alone and not inclined to stop for every ‘scenic view’, she was drawn instead to the meditative state of driving long distances; the focused solitude of speeding through the landscape in contrast to her day-to-day life, while the practice of taking blurry pictures was counter to her professional training. It became a way of refuting both the tradition of historical landscape representation, while seeming to favour aesthetic practice over theoretical rigour.

After almost twenty years of taking photographs from the driver’s seat, Horowitz chose to develop *Blurry Canada* into a project and to travel across the country in both directions via the Trans-Canada Highway. As with most of Horowitz’s art practice, *Blurry Canada* grew out of an activity that she enjoyed and which was already part of her life; in a similar vein, some of her other projects are based on playing Scrabble or taking up amateur astronomy. Through her practice, Horowitz explores the shift from leisure into work, focusing on the boundary between professionalism and hobby. The vacation time of driving and photographing was followed by rigorous classification of over 20,000 images and 175 hours of video footage, while the initial distancing from theoretically rigorous practice became the conceptual focus of the piece. Meanwhile, the meditative mindset of being on the road was replaced by a shift into production and exhibition - her personal practice of snapping pictures transplanted into the gallery space. The place of subjectivity within the project shifted as well, from the distanced practice of taking photographs and video without looking, towards a very personal and engaged process of their classification, selection, and presentation. The initial distance from the images was replaced by reliving the trip through them, while the private activity of driving alone and photographing was replaced by selecting the images for public display. The guide accompanying the video was also a monumental task of sorting through 175 hours of footage, taking screenshots for the snippets of memories about the trip and a schedule of when certain places will flash by on the screen.

The gallery installation consists of three rows of chromogenic photographs and two monitors with video footage that covers the entire duration of the drive. Horowitz is interested in rituals of classification, especially as they relate to photography. She tagged images with the typologies that emerged in this process, such as instances of bug splatter on the windshield, an open window cutting diagonally through the composition, side mirrors, or landmarks. These categories became the foundation for the logic through which the prints were organized: each

province, for example, had to be represented in the middle and bottom rows that show the two legs of the trip, as well as in the top row containing only overpasses. Horowitz set out to photograph as many overpasses as possible. They suggest that there are other directions crossing the land, other landscapes, and limitless other combinations of roads; they make the task of driving and photographing seem infinitely expandable.

The Canadian tradition of landscape representation promises a certain knowledge of the country through its traversal: from the paintings by the Group of Seven, to the survey expeditions and building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, or the 2008 film *One Week*. From the time of its invention photography’s promise of objectivity offered unprecedented scope of documentation and archiving of scientific data, which in landscape photography was closely linked to the colonial project of discovering and possessing new land. Photographing beautiful landscapes is, therefore, a politically charged gesture as it is intimately tied to the notion that the landscape is devoid of human presence. Despite the obvious human construction of roads and their accompanying infrastructure, scenic highways still offer numerous signs for locations where one might take picturesque photographs of the surrounding landscape. Through vacation snapshots, a family road trip might look like a wilderness tour, complete with mountain climbs, lookouts, and scenic views.

Horowitz’s project is created in awareness of the politics that imbue these choices. The mediation inherent in the experience of photographing and filming the landscape is at the forefront of the project. As Jeff Nye writes in the catalogue essay for *Another Roadside Abstraction*, “access to any landscape from the road is mediated. The ditch is in the way. The car window is in the way. Speed is in the way. Memories of other countless and ubiquitous landscape images are in the way... All of these operate like screens - filtering, blocking, obscuring while simultaneously showing and presenting.”ⁱ Horowitz’s inclusion of the car and the road in the side view mirrors and splatters of insects on the windshield, as well as the accidental framing of the images, brings to the fore the continual human presence and alteration of the landscape along the highway. Meanwhile, the video suggests the tedium of driving with the occasional landmark: the rhythm of stops, overpasses, changing weather, and landscape shifts.

The selection of images for the exhibition deliberately pulls on the viewer’s heartstrings by referencing all the necessary tropes of Canadian landscape and regional pride, the romanticism that’s associated with that kind of imagery: prairie grain elevators, the red earth of Prince Edward Island, the rocks of the Canadian Shield, the Rocky Mountains in the distance. These references, despite being out of focus and seen through a car window, tie Blurry Canada inferentially to the tradition of landscape photography. The prints and the videos are lush aesthetic objects, even if they are blurry. They are beautiful, yet created accidentally by shooting through a window of a speeding car; the amount of information captured by the camera and its pulled focus, unlike within the tradition of landscape photography, becomes a part of the aesthetics of the image. Furthermore, the process of classification

and selection was guided primarily by Horowitz’s aesthetic decisions about the formal qualities of the photographs, in a paradox that both engages in and refutes their relationship to the picturesque.

The sense of speed in the photographs and the video, while creating a slight sense of vertigo, plays on the important link between photograpo-hy, film, and a desire to capture duration and movement. It is an enduring trope in photographic representation, from the continual fascination with Muybridge’s studies of running animals, to the classic stock photography shot of a bullet shattering a glass of water, and the mythology surrounding the audience’s shock at the first screening of the Lumiere brothers’ *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*. These images uphold a certain trust in the camera’s mechanistic ability to reveal the ‘truth’ by controlling time, and with it to disclose the limitations and subjectivity of human vision and memory.

In the process of going through the 20,000 images collected during the trip, Horowitz relived the moments she photographed, the moving landscape now stilled by her camera. The process of creating the video guide books involved writing short passages describing her memories of the trip and creating screen grabs, many of which are self-portraits that are a consequence of checking that the camera was on. This memory work and reflection embedded in the project is a meditation on photography and its role in offering an opportunity to reconnect with moments long after they have passed. It is intimately connected to Horowitz’s desire to express the sense of freedom afforded by wandering – the complex relationship with time and duration which evolves from the paradox of sitting still, yet getting somewhere; of 175 hours spent thinking, mind-wandering, and looking.

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Natalia Lebedinskaia
Curator, Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba

LIST OF WORKS
RISA HOROWITZ
Two Canada Videos, 175:00, HD video, 2010
Blurry Canada, 75 chromogenic prints, 2010*
*Each print is titled with the corresponding geographic location and date.
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ISBN 978-1-927076-03-3
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ⁱ David Carneau, Robert Enright, Monica Tap, and Jeff Nye, 2011, *Another roadside abstraction: David Carneau and Monica Tap : organized by the Dunlop Art Gallery : curated by Jeff Nye*, Regina: Dunlop Art Gallery, 6.

