

Have I been here before?

An interactive video installation by **Lenka Novakova**

February 9th – March 17, 2012

Reception: Thursday, February 9th

7–10 pm the artist will be in attendance



Installation image: Lenka Novakova, 2010

Art Crawl: Friday, February 10th 7–11 pm

Performances by Lenka Novakova and Karijn de Jong:

Thursday, February 9th at 7:30 pm

Friday, February 10th at 8 pm



HAMILTON ARTISTS INC
ARTIST RUN CENTRE

Lenka Novakova's interactive video installation "Have I been here before?" invites the viewer/participant to contemplate the nature of his/her own being through the act of self-reflection within the space. Visitors are invited to walk up and down the steps and around the structure in order to observe the movement of their own bodies within the imaginary space of the projected image. Two large mirrors placed in each corner of the gallery reflect the entire situation back to the space each from a different angle. The play of shadows, light, reflected, refracted image and the repetition of the infinite leads to a contemplative state of mind and projection of one's own self within the personal as well as larger concept of time and space.

Hamilton artist and McMaster University student Christina de Melo interviewed Lenka Novakova in Montreal on January 20, 2012 regarding her work.

Christina de Melo: *You've expressed an interest in transforming viewers' understanding of the screen as a two-dimensional experience. How does your piece at the Inc. subvert conventions of the screen?*

Lenka Novakova: Currently, my work, in terms of its own theory, has to do with thinking through ideas of theatre and ideas of cinema. And so in this installation, both of these things are happening simultaneously. So we have a space here, and theatre is something that is happening now and it is real - so we have the real architecture and we have the real person in the middle of the installation. I also like to think of work in terms of an auditorium and in terms of a space, so I'm really shifting these spaces within the gallery. In relation to theatre, I simply take the spectator out of the auditorium and place them right onto the stage - I turn the spectator into the performer. I like to think about these divisions of spaces in terms of who is actually performing and who is observing. In regards to the division of space in cinema, there is the auditorium and there is the screen. The screen is creating the illusion of a three-dimensional space or the illusion of time. In this installation, I like to think that the principles of theatre and cinema are really coming together to redefine traditions of space, and question who is the performer here and who is the spectator. Let's say the spectator comes in and is put right in the middle of this whole thing - he is creating his own reflection in a minimal and simple way, and creating his own comprehension of what is happening. That self-reflective state of the spectator is really my interest here. It's not necessarily the experience of the spectator, which has more to do with my own thinking and research behind the work. In terms of the spectator, I'd like for them to just come in the space and explore it, and enjoy the experience.

CdM: *Your earlier works seemed to focus more tightly on water and its movement through light, but your more recent installations involve the body more directly; that is, live human bodies are themselves the projection in I Am the Light and Where Are You going Ray? Can you speak to this shift?*

LN: It's an interesting dynamic in my work, though it doesn't mean that I've abandoned the idea of water and landscape - I still work very much with these themes. But I think I have been tempted recently to bring the figure back into my work. One possible explanation for this shift is that I was trained as a traditional sculptor in Europe, and I worked with the human figure for a number of years before I went through my more recent training and started to work



Installation image: Lenka Novakova, 2010

in installation, projection and light, and with phenomenological issues. My background in figurative art is really extensive. For a number of years I was working with the human form, and the expression of figures within that classical state. In terms of my own personal reflection, it had to do with questioning where all those years went, and how to reintroduce the figure into my work. Now that I am starting to work with choreographers and dancers and their bodies in play almost as objects also, the element of performance simply re-introduces the body and its participatory effect on the installation, particularly through movement and light. In the future developments of my practice, the body, its choreography, and the elements of performance will become more apparent and complex.

CdM: *What does the title of the work refer to?*

LN: This work was created in Quebec City at *La Chambre Blanche*, as part of the residency program, and that's where the title also was chosen. When the spectator sits down on the steps, and then looks to the left and to the right and sees nothing but these steps and their own image repeating, I think I'm just trying to introduce this kind of question where they wonder - what is it that they are looking at? Why are they looking at it? And at the end, my experience is that they do sit there and observe themselves in that reflective way, and are thinking, 'What is this all about?' So I think it has to do with that moment where we all stop in a certain time and space and we are not really sure why, but there is something that prompts a certain reflection of the past and the present.

CdM: *How did you conceive of this work? Was it something that came to you in an immediate way, or did you have to work through the idea and plan for a longer period of time?*

LN: My residency at *La Chambre Blanche* was site-specific, so I had three weeks where I was working in the gallery with the space and the concept that I chose, and another 3 weeks to finish the work. So I spent lots of time in Quebec City. It's an old city, and there is a division of the old and new town, in a way, and the older town is higher up, so there are always steps to go up in Quebec City -- these stairways that you have to walk up to get to the old part of the town. I did a number of works about the steps, just recording people going up and down the steps. When the three weeks came together, there was also a column in the gallery and I wanted to work with the vertical space of the gallery and the horizontal space of the gallery and recreate this kind of experience of forming an opinion in Quebec City. So when I look back and ask myself where this work is coming from, it's really quite obvious for me that it emerged from this period of time in Quebec City.

CdM: *What advice would you give to emerging artists working in installation, video, and site-specific arts?*

LN: Travelling with the work is the most rewarding experience. I brought this installation to Wisconsin and when people look at it they would say "I've never seen anything like that before." It's a whole different experience. I think that's why exhibitions should travel, and sometimes you reach people who have a great experience. It's worthwhile to explore this and bring the work to people.

Interview with Lenka Novakova by Christina de Melo

Lenka Novakova was born in the Czech Republic and lives and works in Canada. In 2010, she completed her MFA at Concordia University, Montreal. Recent residencies include the Kunstnarhuset Messen, Alvik, Norway and the Santa Fe Art Institute, Santa Fe, New Mexico. She has exhibited throughout Canada and internationally, including exhibitions at Bain Saint-Michel, Montreal, QC, 'Aqua Ephemere' and at the 11th DMZ Art Festival, Seokjang-Ri Art Gallery, Republic of Korea.

Christina de Melo works in the mediums of photography and mixed media sculpture to create images and objects that reveal the irony and irreconcilability of our attempts to distance ourselves from nature. She moved to Hamilton in 2005, and is presently working towards a Masters of Arts degree at McMaster University.

Karijn de Jong is a Hamilton-based artist who started showing her work locally in 2005. Not formerly trained in any particular medium she enjoys variety, working with: installation, written word, and has recently taken interest in performance art and music. She draws from a history working in picture framing, the use of found objects, contemplations of society, obscurity and synchronicity, often touching on environmental/social and philosophical themes.



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