

The 'Witchdoctor' is in

Michael Dudeck, Winnipeg's queer shaman performance artist, visits Fredericton.
Story by Mike Landry

According to Statistics Canada, Michael Dudeck just spent the last six weeks as one of their project managers in the arctic. That was his official job title, at least. On a deeper level, Dudeck says he was acting as shaman – entering communities and people's homes with diplomacy and politeness. And he wasn't just tallying numbers. He was researching for his artistic practice.

Dudeck, who hails from Winnipeg but has embraced a nomadic lifestyle, has been building a lexicon for his practice since graduating from the University of Manitoba School of Art in 2008.

His work encompasses performance, drawing, sculpture and photography wrapped up in a queer shamanism he has devised and is expanding. Bending status quo notions of religion, sexuality, history, monasticism and whatever other constructions he gets his hands on, he's even created his own language.

He will be in Fredericton for a month beginning Friday, June 15, for a performance residency at Gallery Connexion. It's his first visit to the East Coast, and he hopes to use the residency to digest what he experienced up north.

Drawn to notions of spirits and shadow people, and other Northern mysteries, Dudeck says the North is a "hyper-real, quasi-heaven environment," and the white of snowcaps, clouds and fog "really is this huge living, breathing painting that encompasses everything."

There will be three components to Dudeck's residency in Fredericton. One, which he calls "almost the office job work," will involve facilitating two rituals for the full moon and new moon in what he calls social sculptures. A second will be a ceremony where he'll premier his new foray into writing sacred music with a vocoder and synthesizer – "prog-rock meets Catholic Church meets pagan ceremony."

The third part is a series of performances where Dudeck works with one of his large-scale photographs printed on rag paper, scratching the photo to form words from his own language for six to eight hours at a time while fasting.

Dudeck began doing drawing performances after a residency at the Glasshouse in Tel Aviv, an artistic home-laboratory "to promote artistic experiments that are based on performance and installation art in the domestic space." He says these pieces are always better than the results from his more traditional studio practice.

"Everyone always connects more with concentrated energy," he says. "All of the energy flowing through your body and in the air gets cemented in that image."



'Consecration' (2012, ink, graphite and carving on ragpaper) from the series 'Cathexis.'

PHOTO: LARRY GLAWSON/COURTESY OF PARI NADIMI GALLERY



An installation of Michael Dudeck's exhibition 'Parthenogenesis,' which was at Pari Nadimi Gallery in Toronto from Feb. 5 to March 7, 2009.

So, when other people look at it, whether conscious of it or not, they connect."

Dudeck's faith in artistic energy was cemented while working with renowned performance artist Marina Abramovic. Dudeck assisted Abramovic during her retrospective *Artist is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 2010.

"I really have to do my best to keep my vehicle (his body and mind) clean to house all that energy. It's like my teacher, like it's talking to me. It illuminates things."

As Dudeck continues to build his ideology of queer shamanism, he's finding the personality he always harboured but didn't fully understand.

"There's this notion in contemporary art where you have to violently justify everything ... I work really, really hard to not make sense of it."

"I have a bunch of things that surpassed being a 'Boy' when I was young, and it was struggle to house all that and not know what all these things were."

Expanding his identity to welcome contradictions – adopted himself into a Jewish family as child, Dudeck now adopts religions, cultures and gender as art – he wants to expand his audience's concepts of what is possible through his practice.

"It sometimes gets out of hand, but I'm very blessed to have a lot of people in my life who support me and my work," he says. "There are about 33 staples I have to have with me – a high-powered blender, basic art stuff, certain clothes, certain things to keep sane. I constantly have to remind self that when you're pioneering ground there is a sort of crippling uncertainty which has to become your friend."

Dudeck will be at Gallery Connexion until July 15. Contact the gallery at 454-1433 to inquire about dates for Dudeck's performances. S

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Roger Sterling, played by John Slattery, from 'Mad Men,' seated in a Corona Chair designed by Poul M. Volther. PHOTO: SUBMITTED

Budding good taste



JUDITH MACKIN
design driven

I am fascinated by the question of taste. What is it, what is its worth and how – if you're thinking you'd like to increase your current supply – does one acquire it?

I'd like to think my position on the question of taste is not only evolving, but exists in a constant state of flux, because I'm not entirely certain of the origins or basis of my own supply of taste. I'm as intrigued as much by its absence in some people as its abundance in others. I know any number of perfectly gifted, intelligent and interesting people who are decidedly challenged when it comes to matters of taste. I'd no more trust them to pick out wallpaper than I would a tree surgeon to perform a heart bypass.

I suspect taste may be something akin to artistic talent, if only in this limited sense: while it may be true some are born with more of it than others, it's a useless faculty unless you work on it. As the English novelist Martin Amis says of writers, "Genius is all the God-given stuff – the altitude of perception and articulacy. Talent is craft." Amis's point, as I take it, is something commonplace among artists – it's all very well to be gifted, but there's no substitute for hard work, discipline and experience. Taste, it turns out, is one part nature to nine parts nurture.

What most intrigues me about taste is how subject it is to history and circumstance. One of the reasons the hit television series *Mad Men* is so popular is because – with its painstaking recreation of an era 60 years removed from our own – it serves to remind us that the past is at once terribly familiar and deeply strange. And the source of that strangeness is little more, really, than

a matter of taste. As the cut of their clothes and the style of their furniture suggest, the denizens of *Mad Men* are effectively us, but with our sense of taste removed. Or, perhaps, not so much 'removed' as unborn. What makes them so interesting is how convincingly they illustrate that taste is conditional, almost entirely caught up in the march of time.

How one might acquire good taste, given that it is so subject to change, is actually quite simple, at least in principle: education. Anyone can acquire and cultivate sufficient reserves of good taste, it's just a matter of application. There's no getting around the fact you've got to immerse yourself in what philosophers call 'the discourse,' which, so far as taste is concerned, simply means you've got to pay close attention to what's going on in the world of design.

In part, this is what I mean when I celebrate – as I so often do – democratic design. Design is democratic because we all have equal opportunity, if we're

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prepared to attach our attention to the conversation going on all around us, to build up reserves of taste sufficient to appreciate it.

You may not be in a position to afford to decorate your home like Roger Sterling in *Mad Men* decorates his office – his white leather Corona chair, for example, costs more than my car – but you can certainly afford to position yourself to know why that office is a triumph of good taste. S

Judith Mackin runs an interior design company, punch inside. You can follow her blog at www.judithmackin.ca, on twitter @judithmackin or email her: judith@judithmackin.ca.

Quite an honour

This week, the Charlotte Street Arts Centre hosts New Brunswick's first-ever Aboriginal Artists' Conference from Tuesday, June 12, to Thursday, June 14. As part of the conference – presented in partnership with Saint Mary's First Nation, the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design, the University of New Brunswick and Saint Thomas University – the arts centre is opening the exhibition *Honouring the Spirit of Sagatay*, featuring the work of more than a dozen aboriginal artists from various First Nations communities around the province.

An opening reception is being held Wednesday, June 13, from 5-7 p.m. at the centre. The conference also features presentations by the Canada Council for the Arts, the Arts Branch of the New Brunswick Department of Culture, Tourism and Healthy Living as well as by artsnb, and several artist talks by emerging and established First Nations artists, free arts and traditional craft workshops and demonstrations, traditional chanting and drumming, opening and closing ceremonies led by Elders Imelda Perley and Maggie Paul, along with a tree planting dedication ceremony in honour of late Elder Gwen Bear (Sagatay).

A full conference schedule can be found on the Charlotte Street Arts Centre's website at www.charlottestreetarts.ca. You may also contact the gallery at 454-6952. S



Clay/fur/horsehair masks by Valerie Jean, an NBCCD aboriginal visual arts student.



Birch bark porcupine quill baskets by Audrey Sanipass from Indian Island First Nation.



An acrylic painting by Dozay Christmas, originally from Tobique First Nation.