

Barrie
Jones



Contributors

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I first met Barrie Jones in 1987, when he was teaching at the University of Windsor and I was a newly arrived curator at the Art Gallery of Windsor. At the time, Barrie was working on two bodies of photographs. One was *Young Women and Young Men of Canada* (1988–91) in which head-and-shoulders portraits of young women and men were combined with line drawings of archetypal figures from classical Roman and Greek statuary. It was presented as a solo exhibition at the AGW a few years later. The other was his *Trans Canada Cyclists* project (1987–88), which comprises photographs of bicyclists of varying ages, genders, ethnicities, and levels of fitness. Being a bit thick, I initially assumed the use of “Trans Canada” in the title referred to portraits of very serious cyclists who were equipped for long-distance touring. It was only later that I realized the reference was to the coast-to-coast itinerary Barrie followed in realizing the project and the term was intended to signify the performance of the photographer rather than the cyclists.

Even if it took me a while to get this, I admired *Trans Canada Cyclists* for Barrie’s unusual skill in obtaining the trust of the people he photographed and creating a situation in which they could perform at least a facet of their particular conception of self. This would be crucial to the evocative bodies of work he has produced over the following three decades. Projects such as *Work and Leisure* (2006–13), *Urban Living* (2009–12), and especially *Bodywork* (2005–08) depict situations in which it would be have been easy to make his subjects look ridiculous and more difficult to produce a complex and open-ended image. Barrie’s ability to engage with the people and situations he photographs on a level that avoids judgement along with his considerable technical skill have been central to the success of his work, which, for me, more than fulfills its claim to address the human figure as a site in which layers of identity, desire, individual vulnerability, and social position intersect.

Grant Arnold

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This exhibition of Barrie Jones’s work produced since 1998, when he became a lecturer in the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory at UBC, makes a number of ideas evident. He was a peer of Marian Penner Bancroft, Ian Wallace, Jeff Wall, and Rodney Graham at a time when multiple meanings of the label the “Vancouver School” came into use. He primarily works in colour. Eggleston’s *Guide*, published in 1976, recognized colour as a legitimate part of art photography. Jones works at a large scale, which in today’s terms makes him a contemporary photographic artist. He works in series around a central idea; figures predominate. Jones’s pictures see the quotidian around us, often

in odd or uncomfortable settings. He might see a scene and has to ask the person to let him set it up again at another time; he calls this kind of image making “negotiated documentary.” Barrie sees these as portraits, but I’m more taken with the fact that he shows the subjects engaged in specific activities.

Andrew Gruft and I exhibited a selection of Barrie’s *Hockey Shots* (1973–81) at our NOVA Gallery in 1978. In a Canadiens jersey, carrying a folding hockey stick and wearing a goalie mask, he was photographed at ancient monuments in North Africa, Greece, and Europe in the early 1970s while travelling as a tourist with artist friends. Barrie credits some of this performative quality in his work and the idea of identities being acted out to Glenn Lewis, though we might also think of Gathie Falk and Tom Graff. Performance was *au courant* in the early 1970s.

What a wry and ironic comment that Canadians are always represented as either in the wilderness or as hockey-mad as Jones poses with famous art monuments. London’s palace guard, tongue in cheek, facing “our” queen colony status. But there is a photographic history twist as well. These discoveries of ancient monuments by Europeans in the nineteenth century were documented by photographers such as Baldus, Du Camp, Le Gray, Frith, Marville, and more. This was viewed as “orientalism,” especially if the figures involved signified a European view of the exotic. Jones himself is the only “exotic” in this series, as he poses in front of these tourist attractions in the twentieth century.

Another of Jones’s references to photographic history shows in his individual portraits of working people, but little is revealed about their jobs except the mention in the title. These are portraits of anonymous individuals. Their jobs are low paying, invisible—gas jockey, security guard—not skilled like those of the people in August Sander’s portraits, who were photographed with tools of their trade, like baker, hod carrier.

Barrie Jones’s work is not cinematic, not experimental, but clearly photographic, which might explain why he has been under-appreciated, especially here in Canada. His photographs are very much pictures from our times. Light filled, colourful, aware of prior history, and questioning.

For our friend Barrie.

Claudia Beck + Andrew Gruft

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Barrie Jones: A few comments on his exhibition of selected works September 2021

Barrie Jones studied photography at the University of British Columbia with Fred Herzog back in the 1970s, and subsequently taught photography there beginning in 1998. Barrie has been a long-time friend and a reliable colleague in all matters relating to photography and ever generous with his advice. He is an outstanding photographer and expert printer, and his early work extends from the novel to the experimental. His early preoccupations were open to all photographic experimentation seeking various representations; he has been an innovative artist from his first light boxes from *Pacific Salmon Series* (1981–83) suspended in space and time as a representation of an experience of motion. There is a kind of representation and whimsical expression of will to the reflections of the absurd.

To his credit, Barrie was not a devotee to the previous UBC conceptual photography generation nor to their subsequent followers.

His social documentary projects of complex personal identities are worth mentioning, and especially his staged tableaux from the personal services sectors, from the body builder, to beauty skin immersion treatments, and the clinical body tattoo parlour. The persons performing and receiving these services are actual clients and vendors, not actors. These deadpan frontal shots are astonishing and offer alarming revelations. A continuing photographic tome since has been Barrie's *Hockey Shots* (1973–81) and *Trans Canada Cyclists* portraits (1987–88). It is important to note that Barrie's innovative social documentary pictures predate Lorraine Gilbert's well-known *Tree Planter* portraits as well as Jin-me Yoon's self-portraits from the 1990s, shot at various picturesque Canadian locations. From the earliest self-portraits of the hockey player to his recent "wobbling" videos and cliff jumpers, young people are the subjects, disconnected from or out of place with the scene that it is occurring.

Barrie's video portraits are part of his ongoing experimental interests that explore the spirit and attitudes of young people. Youths are put to several tests of physical circumstances that reveal their mental state and emotions. The spectator is subsequently emotionally swept into a strange and mysterious psychodrama.

Barrie Jones leaves the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory with big shoes to fill.

Christos Dikeakos

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Back and forth: The curious case of Barrie Jones

While separated by time, I feel like I've been chasing Barrie Jones's institutional and geographical footprints for a while. In common, we both finished a degree at York University in Toronto, taught in Windsor, and "landed" here in Vancouver to teach lens-based practices at the University of British Columbia. Like a photographic trace, before ever meeting him or after knowing him, I've felt his presence.

There was a time when our common journey was not yet identified, reminiscent of the effects of the first images I saw of his work that spoke in a way that was equally forthright and elusive. His portraits carefully reveal documented details of unique facial identities and body dispositions that are invaded by the typecasting uniforms they wear. Placed in the centre of the frame, they are captured in accurate focus and flawlessly lit, the individuality of their faces in a battle with the symbolism of their attire. His tableau style highlights each as a character in their own monologue, performing a direct link to their role in society and in service to it. The farce of the staging is in equal measure to the uniform itself—a cover for the "real" while promising only that. His pictorial evidence is matter-of-fact while being slippery and unstable.

Barrie's conflicting persuasions contributed to the language of both photography and concept as a part of Vancouver's "photo-conceptual" history. It wasn't until sixteen years after we had finally met that I truly understood how Barrie's character contributed to Vancouver's history through *Pacific Salmon Series: Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer* (1981–83). The piece utilizes his signature staged portrait linked to a real-time event. Scenery caught in the individual backlit photographs both divide the seasons and connect them in a fluid horizon through a time-based chronology. The middle plane shows us the weather's effects on the documented subject, as her clothing and facial expression bulks up or pares down to match with the changing temperature. In all seriousness, the foreground features a blurry flying salmon fleeting across the scene, a peripheral vision in our fovea, the centre of our view. Revisiting Barrie's past in my present I realized that (much like Barrie himself) he taints deadly serious intent with a snickering humour.

His work exploits the characteristics of photography as giving presence to a self-possessed moment, proliferated in what he calls "directed fictions." In the *Bodywork* series (2005–08), the interaction of labour and consumer builds visual geometries of their bodies. For example, we see: a paid physical trainer in the home of a client correcting them on their form, an acupuncturist strategically inserting energy flow through pathways of a person, and the steady stream in which a worker paints a dark tan onto the skin of a naked body

without making actual contact. Arrested in time, Barrie complicates one inner logic of photography that focuses on a viewer's desire for evidence rather than representation. In the indexical, there is a promise to make the "felt" of social relations to become real.

Upon first meeting Barrie when I was a student, I was admittedly intimidated. His immense knowledge of photographic practice—including its histories, current debates, and technical processes—is extraordinary. Much like his photographs staging expert/client interactions, I have a vivid memory snapshot of me standing next to him as he instantly identified and described exactly what kind of platinotype image a photographic artifact was, his rationale unwavering. Barrie knows that innovative forms rely on past forms to go forward; his expertise is less a crutch than a foundation from which he catapults into new inquiries.

Mimicking his photographic style, Barrie's recent video work hijacks frozen time into a fleeting image, denying stability—sometimes both literally and figuratively. In his work *Couples* (2016 and ongoing) we are witness to the unifying dynamics of intimate relationships as the subjects strive to balance themselves separately while standing for their image together. The photographic point of view offers viewers a way to navigate ambiguity, but his videos decentre the dynamic through an endless constant presence. The relationship also comments on our current reliance on technology, as our physical being must now be consulted with electronic dimensions. A presence of the present.

Over the years Barrie has been a teacher, a director, a mentor, a colleague and a friend to me. In all these roles he thoughtfully detects and processes the most nuanced of details as informed by a bigger, more complicated picture. His example and commitment have influenced my own enduring passion for teaching art. Decades of photographic theory suggest that the medium grapples with our desire for truth. But, much like the artist himself, Barrie's practice gives evidence of something more compelling usually aligned with truth—honesty. Barrie's attitude toward art, teaching, and even life demonstrate conviction and principle, but ultimately it is his genuine negotiation of the unstable where the complexity lies.

Christine D'Onofrio

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Human experience is a uniform

A uniform can take a range of forms, from full-scale costume to a single patch that signals the wearer as both separate from the common group and a member of a unique group. It is a physical mantle that manifests the concept of outside of and inclusive as equally important states for social navigation within a given context.

Jones's early *Hockey Shots* series (1973–81) placed an element of the Montreal Canadiens uniform in disparate but familiar cultural scenes, precipitating a refreshing rereading of both. It mashed up the lowbrow practice of hockey with revered classical icons as equal human achievements—at first an outlandish assertion, but after one gazes at the images, on some levels it seems a valid idea. Hockey fans proudly wear the jersey of their team to demonstrate their support and gain status through association with winners. The red hockey jersey signals a glorious belonging reserved for those with special qualities in contrast to the humble pullovers, vests, hats, and badges worn by gas jockeys and fast food servers, prompting one to consider the absolute minimum requirement for a garment or sign to be considered a uniform.

The young bodies in Barrie Jones's images are self-conscious, obviously embarrassed about the uniform signalling them at the low end of a commercial exchange; certainly their uniforms are not worn by choice. The idea of cool branding, absolutely worn by choice and very popular with young people, is a uniform that likely would trigger much different body language than a Wal-Mart vest. The clinical background isolates the uniform and the body from a context and allows one to easily sense the pride of the soldier, confidence of the postal worker, lifeguard, rescuer as opposed to the sheepishness of the low-paid service workers.

There are many years separating Barrie Jones's uniform portraits and his recent *Cliff Jumpers* series, yet several of his leitmotifs unify his diverse practice. The body, a major concern, apparent in the early uniform studies, is found in *Work and Leisure* (2005–08), *Bodywork* (2005–08), *Urban Living* (2009–12), his video works, and joyously in the *Cliff Jumpers* series. Imagine a hypothetical exhibition with vertically formatted pieces arranged side by side alternating uniform / jumper. There are interesting overt and covert points of similarity and difference: undefined space / natural space; human body passive / body expressive; fully covered by a uniform / almost naked; studio flash with high key lighting freezes static pose/ high shutter speed. high key light freezes action; and work / leisure. Although we are imagining this side-by-side exhibit, one would make the intuitive extrapolation that the

person safely confined and isolated via the uniform is the same individual dangerously leaping into the void celebrating youth and nature. Given the time separating these works, one can speculate that traditional maturing, moving from the carefree to the responsible, would be apparent, yet we observe the opposite; the “young people” have grown from work / duty passive presence in an empty void to the reckless enjoyment of being in the natural world visualized by an observant artist commanding the separating power of photography to crystalize human experience as never fully understandable: there has been, is, and always will be youth.

Chris Gallagher

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I’ve known Barrie Jones in a number of capacities over the past decade: as a student, a contractor, a colleague, and a friend. The last two have made me incredibly familiar with his work, albeit not in an academic manner. It dawned on me, though, that this familiarity was first, one of the unique characteristics of Barrie’s lens-based work, and second, likely not something that only I experienced.

The familiarity of Barrie’s images stems from diverse features, all of which I am convinced are activated differently based on the viewer. While Barrie himself recalls personal memories of place when shooting around Vancouver, I cannot help but see Édouard Manet’s *Un Bar aux Folies Bergère* (1882) when looking at *Amelia and Kim* (2006) or think of another of Manet’s paintings, *Olympia* (1865), in front of *Bikini Wax: Kirsten* (2006). Meanwhile, my partner connects with labour-connotated objects and their photographic physicality, and I can only surmise that long-time friend Christos Dikeakos brings out the collective histories of Vancouver when engaging with Barrie’s work. Still, most of these readings hinge on the formal aspect of the images.

Barrie is a part of the Vancouver School of photography, both because he was there at its nascence with the other artists who formed the movement, and because of his own history in the city and his approach to image making. I recall a class where he discussed his practice as “negotiated documentaries,” a difference he drew from “cinematographic pictures.” I admit I had a hard time grasping the distinction: after all, can’t a documentary also be a type of movie? Don’t both modes of filmmaking involve story making, directors, and visual tropes that are often borrowed from one another? Here is where the contrast lies: where Jeff Wall’s *Mimic* (1982) has clear narrative and intent, *Wire Strippers* (2012) or *Woman with Her Trainer: Jill and Joan*

(2005) merely posit the viewer as witness. During an early walkthrough of the AHVA Gallery during the installation of *Vancouver Work*, I suggested grouping *Book Club* (2004) and *Two Hobos* (2007), or *Jill and Joan with Projector Screen and Picture Window* (2016) in a clear attempt to create more structured narratives. Where I wanted to establish specific discussions around social gaps in Vancouver, Barrie looked at the visible elements that could connect one work with another.

This approach is at the core of his practice. As he would say, one picture is a monolith, two create opposition, but above three is a series, where more than narratives can occur. Think of the series *Uniforms* (1992–2000): its success hinges on the large number of people Barrie photographed. Even its presentation precludes a Manichean interpretation of this compendium of working uniforms: each image is slated at an angle, allowing direct conversation between each panel, but also compelling the viewer to adopt different literal perspectives to see all the photographs. The only question that Barrie directly answers with this series is: what does it look like if every work uniform in the Lower Mainland is photographed? Similarly, in his video works *Couples* (2018–21), *Scream / Don’t Scream* (2018–21), *Smile / Don’t Smile* (2018–21), *Young Actors Smile* (2018–21), and *Young Actors Cry* (2018–21), he merely asks: what happens when people balance on pieces of wood? What happens when someone holds a smile for five minutes? What happens when they are given direction? Over the span of our conversations about this body of works, I’d bring up references that were largely unfamiliar to Barrie, such as popular YouTube content, particularly channels like BuzzFeed or the Try Guys. Although an obvious reference to Andy Warhol’s *Screen Test* (1964–66), the titles *Young Actors Smile* and *Young Actors Scream* felt like a subverted reference to the Kuleshov effect. The modular and agglomerative nature of these iterative series create a sense of familiarity that beckons connections with our own repository of knowledge and associations.

Positioning himself as a meticulous bystander, Barrie neither precludes nor encourages certain reading of his artwork. Far from a cop-out, it allows a multiplicity of conversations that ultimately all intersect in what feels like a shared experience in the backdrop of Vancouver.

Pauline Petit

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The social body is a preoccupation in Barrie Jones's photography—how the body carries a variety of cultural markers whether they are behavioural, gestural, sartorial, prosthetic, or in relation to space and architecture. Bodies leisure, labour, assemble, and bond in common and commercial spaces through engaging in activities that mark out their age, generation, class, gender, race, sexuality, bodily ability, and so on. Bodies come to resemble one another through the performance of consumer trends, but they also bond around political ideals and the markers that identify them as espousing this or that fashion or politic. We are all born into culture, which can operate as a display or a going-through-the-motions of living, or be embodied with the utmost fervour and enthusiasm. Today, within the global capitalist system, humans engage as much through play as through work, as much through disciplinary forces at work as through resistance to these forces. These forces and activities blur into one another. Art is one such complex activity, and a sublimation of libido, some would say. Desire and libido reveal themselves in the many ruptures that open up within Jones's play across photographic references and (counter)traditions. One is also reminded that the body is an extension of land and territory. Jones's depiction of bodies within forests, gardens, houses, and against building facades speaks to the ingenuity and tragedy that underlie our existence on this land, signs that decorate and scar the "backdrop" of *longue durée* and deep time that accommodate, but that also increasingly resist, our activities on this territory.

Marina Roy

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Woman with Bow

The human figure dominates Barrie Jones's work, whether depicted or implied. He sees the individual as an intricate array of personalities and identities, imposed both by our inner selves and by external social forces. His images hover between fact and narrative, emphasizing photography's contradictory capacity both to record factual reality and to prompt speculation or inventions about an image's content.

One favourite: *Woman with Bow* (2009). It documents a woman with a bow standing by a large stump in an urban forest. The photo is lush and crisp, its elements obvious, the intent of the artist left unstated. However, it does contain a range of allusions that may trigger viewers to pose unanswerable questions, or seek resolutions in a narrative form.

An urban forest is almost a contradiction in terms. However, forests in cities are often seen as idyllic spaces to occupy, to walk, sit, meditate, imagine a life not lived in the demanding and raucous city that surrounds it. Conversely, the idyllic has another, uncertain face.

Stereotypically, archers are male, but in *Woman with Bow* Jones overturns conventions about gender roles, bringing the ambiguity of identity and purpose into play. Is the woman a warrior, a form of cupid, an ambusher? This archer has no obvious target, yet she has flexed her bow, arrow ready to be fired. The arc of the bow suggests the movement needed to take aim and shoot. To end a life, engender love, steal something, abduct someone? Is the woman on guard, a defender? Is she an aggressor in waiting? Her bicycle suggests a chase as much as an escape. The literal tension of the bowstring implies impending action, but the archer appears relaxed, at ease, contemplative. Jones offers no answers, and viewers are left alone to question the image or retreat from it.

One question is obvious: who is she? What is her purpose in the forest? In daily life, what roles may she play? In our working lives, we wear camouflage, our inner selves hidden. In private, we can be whomever we wish, don our chosen masks, be the selves we want to present to friends, lovers, or a curious onlooker in a bar. Even the mirror we use in preparing ourselves to face our external worlds inverts the view of our own faces. As individuals, are we one person or many others as well?

Woman with Bow can be considered a cipher. On the one hand, Jones documents a woman in a forest, no deciphering necessary. On the other, he presents a stage, director absent. Personas are implied, their purpose and meanings cloaked. If they are to be uncovered, viewers will have to do that work themselves.

Bob Sherrin

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I first appreciated Barrie Jones's photography in the late 1970s, when he participated in shows such as *13 Cameras*. I also came to know and admire his later pictures while we taught together at UBC—especially his *Work and Leisure* series (2005–08)—where a sort of staged tableau familiar to those acquainted with Vancouver School photography was augmented through a collaborative ethic where the sitters, the workers, were also the actors.

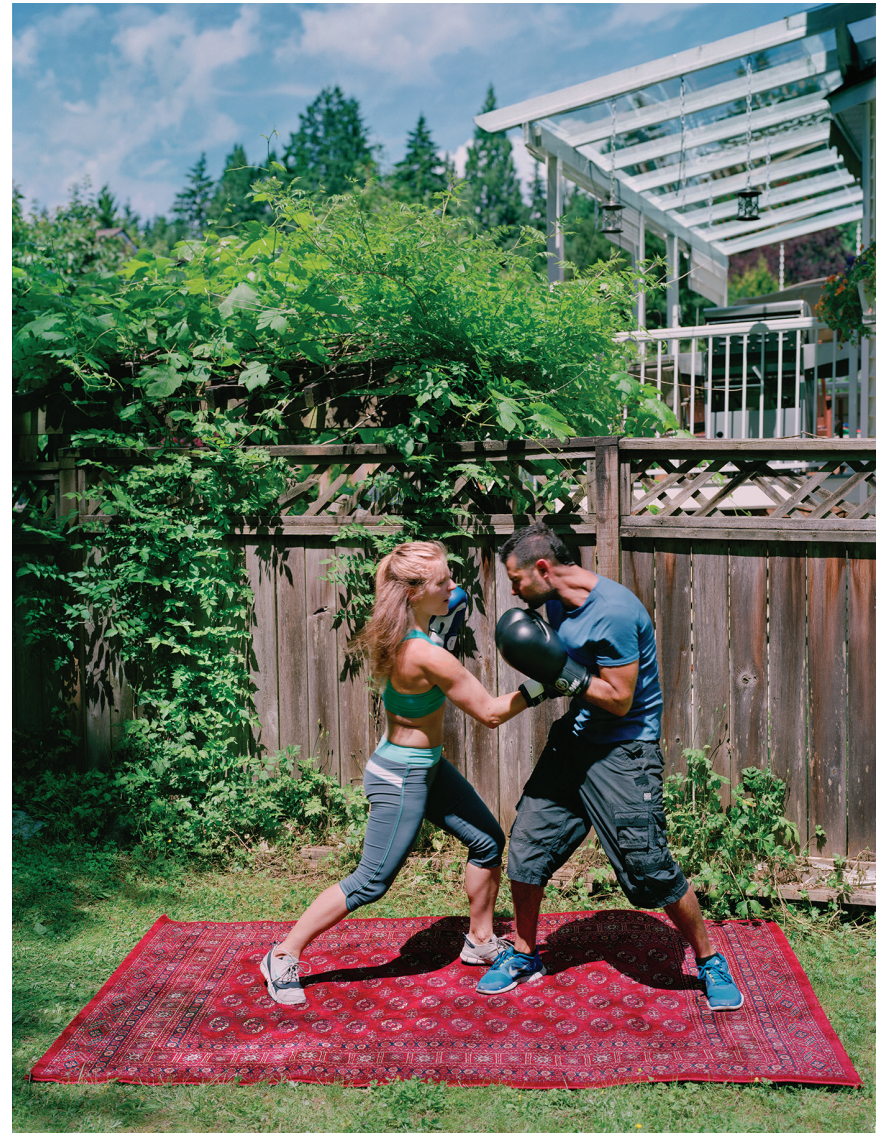
However, in assessing his recent work, I was struck by one project and a single image. His *Berlin Project 1945–2013* is a series of close-up images of stone buildings with pockmarks. The double dating indicates that these “wounds” or “scars”—sometimes haphazardly or intentionally repaired—record the final battle of the Second World War in Europe. Jones, here, photographs what cannot be erased from both the material and ideological record.

That said, one image from his *Screens and Windows* series, *Double Screen* (2014), overwhelms me. It shows the two screens and part of the lectern of a classroom in the Lasserre Building at UBC. I spent hours here as a student watching those screens and many more just below the screens lecturing, unable to see myself from the midway position Barrie chose. That indeterminate factor, that feeling of being on both sides of a monochrome screen, preparing to project, arrests me and achieves the punctum, the wound or “prick” Roland Barthes found as the fundamental affect of photography. Thank you, Barrie.

Bill Wood

Published on the occasion of Barrie Jones's retirement from the UBC Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory and the exhibition *Vancouver Work*, AHVA Gallery, September 7 to October 8, 2021

We acknowledge that the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, is situated on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam). We are grateful for the work, learning, and play that we do here.



Couples Boxing I: Jenn and Antonio, 2013

Couples Boxing II: Jenn and Antonio, 2013

Barrie Jones