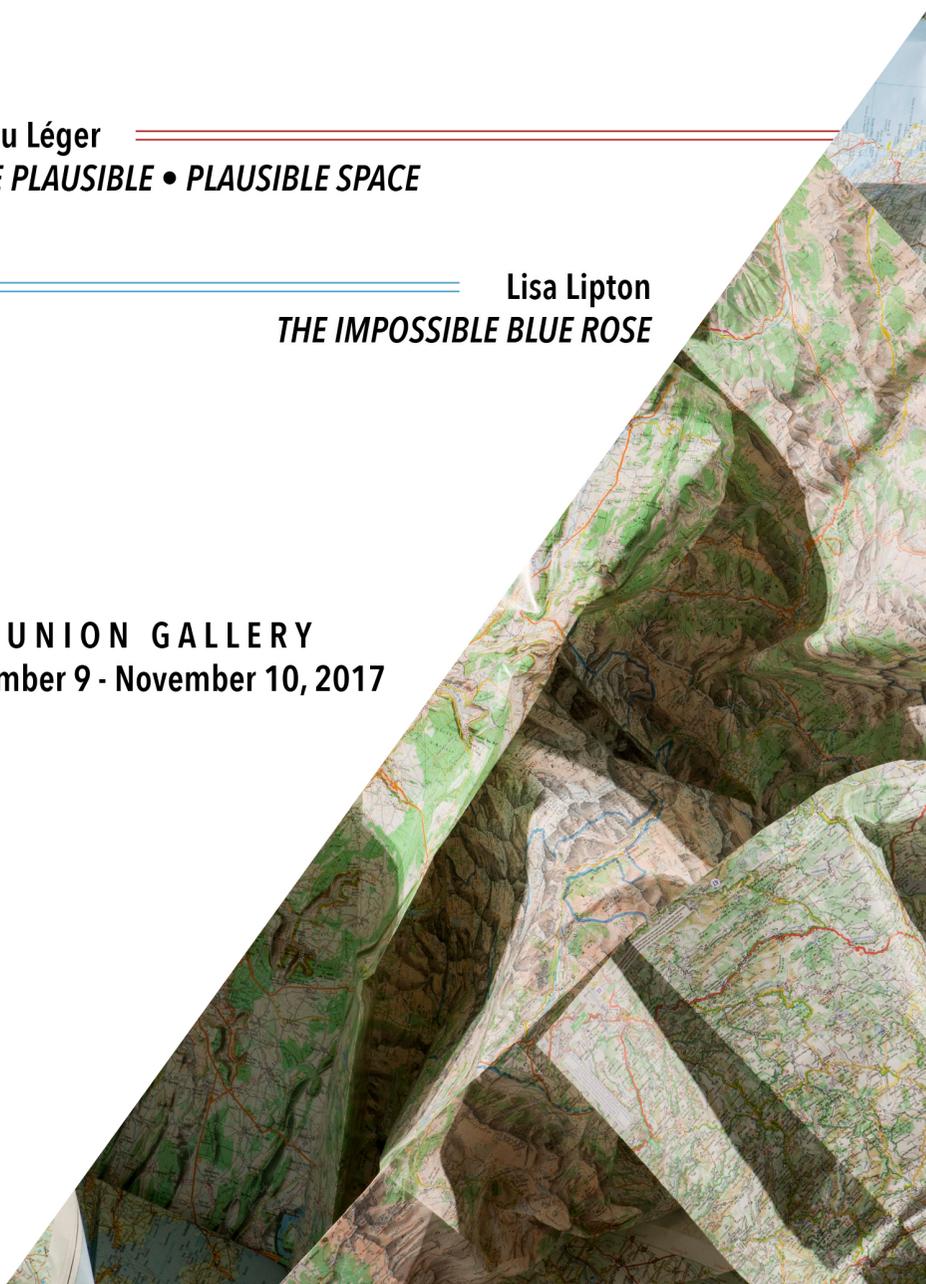


Mathieu Léger
ESPACE PLAUSIBLE • PLAUSIBLE SPACE

Lisa Lipton
THE IMPOSSIBLE BLUE ROSE

UNION GALLERY
September 9 - November 10, 2017



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FOREWORD

The Union Gallery is pleased to produce this catalogue for the exhibitions *Espace Plausible • Plausible Space* by interdisciplinary Moncton-based artist Mathieu Léger and *THE IMPOSSIBLE BLUE ROSE*, a film by Lisa Lipton, a Halifax-based multidisciplinary artist, musician and director. We are delighted to have the opportunity to bring the work of these two accomplished artists to Kingston.

We also welcome two writers who provided exceptional texts for the exhibits. Thomas Hodd, a cultural critic and Associate Professor of English at Université de Moncton, considers Acadian artist Léger's interest in landscape, identity and culture. He aptly situates this work within the larger discourse of internationalism, more specifically the philosophical implications of geographically defined territories in relation to identity and belonging. Teresa Carlesimo is an interdisciplinary artist and PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at Queen's University. In her text she offers a glimpse into Lisa Lipton's journey through the United States that led to her epic docu-fiction *THE IMPOSSIBLE BLUE ROSE* – an eclectic and highly engaging film about identity, discovery and community.

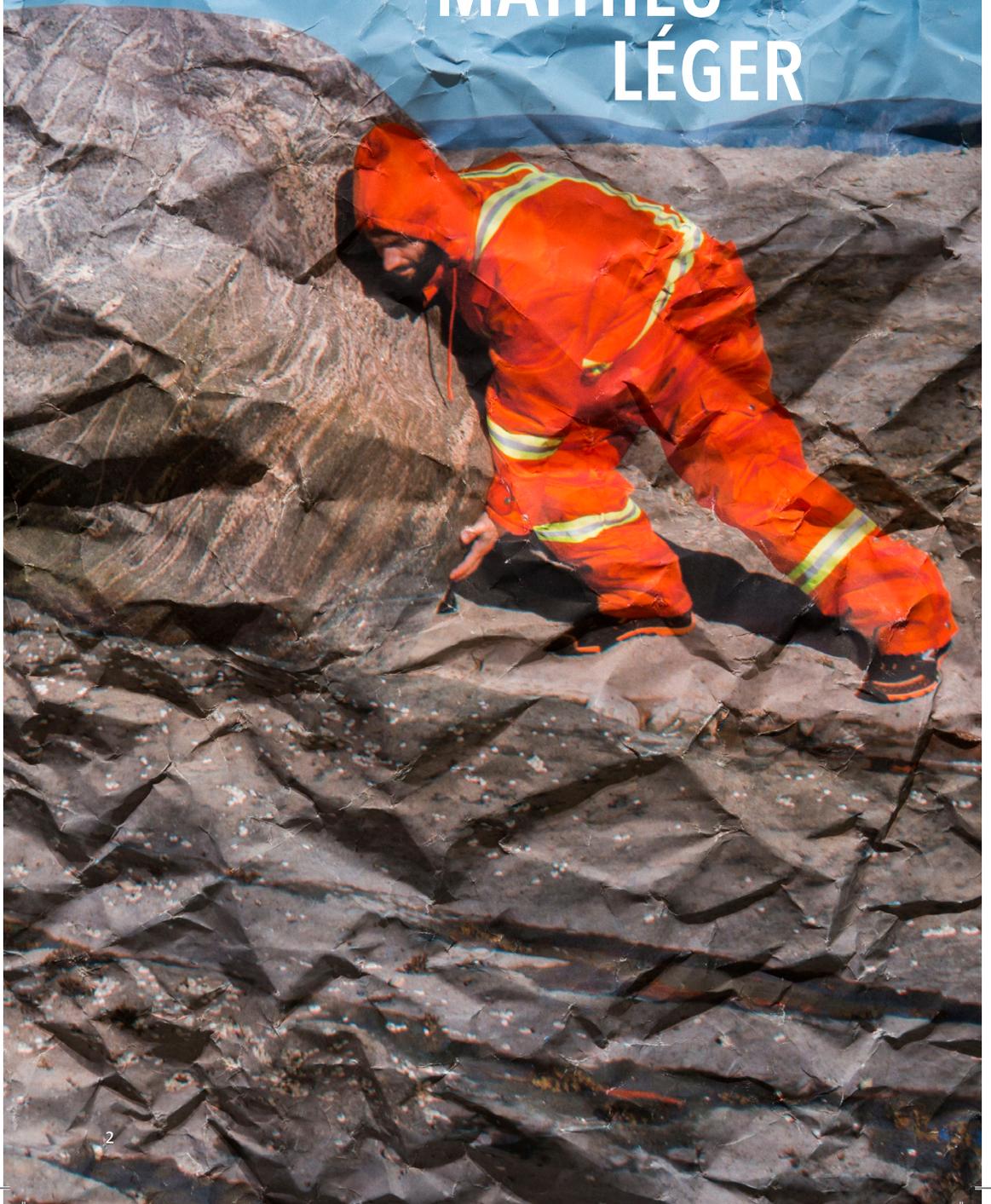
As always the production of any exhibition would not happen without the help of many people. First and foremost I extend my thanks to the artists who were a pleasure to work with through the development and realization of the exhibits. I would also like to acknowledge Thomas Hodd and Teresa Carlesimo for their significant contributions to the catalogue and of course our small but efficient staff and helpers; Ashley Newton for her work on the catalogue, Gord McRae for his technical assistance with the installation, and Claude Bock for the coordination of the public program Intersections: Art & Research.

Through the generosity of the George Taylor Richardson Memorial Fund at Queen's University the gallery was able to support both of these exhibitions and produce the catalogue. Over the years, this fund has made many of the gallery shows by professional artists possible.

We always greatly appreciate the ongoing support we receive from Queen's University, the Alma Mater Society, the Society of Graduate and Professional Students, the Cultural Studies Program at Queen's, the Kingston Arts Council and the City of Kingston Arts Fund.

Jocelyn Purdie
Director, Union Gallery

MATHIEU LÉGER



PLAUSIBLE (ADJ.):

OF AN ARGUMENT, AN IDEA, A STATEMENT, ETC. (Oxford English Dictionary)

THOMAS HODD

Plausible Space is the next installment in Acadian artist Mathieu Léger's multi-year project, entitled *Methodologies for Tourists*, which began in 2012. Conceived as a series of approaches through which to probe connections between landscape, identity, and culture, *Methodologies* explores, in part, how Léger's identity as a descendent of the Acadian diaspora fits into the larger discourse of internationalism that has dominated the first two decades of the 21st century.

Earlier iterations of this project, notably Léger's recent exhibition *Sur un plateau d'argent / On a Silver Platter*, are more obvious in terms of his injection of autobiographical elements, such as names of his forefathers or references to the Acadian Deportation in 1755. Similarly, in one of his performance actions, "Discussing Acadian Exile and Kingdom with Longfellow" (2013), Léger confronts a statue of American writer Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, whose 1847 poem *Évangeline* has become a central part of Acadian mythology.

But whereas the exhibit *Sur un plateau d'argent / On a Silver Platter* offered viewers a series of grouped, engraved silver plates on a variety of topics that inform Léger's identity as an Acadian artist, *Plausible Space* is intentionally sparse and almost singularly focused on the philosophical implications of territory. Indeed, *Plausible Space* is not just part of a larger personal project. With the recent challenging of long-held, geo-political borders in Europe, as well as protectionist movements in countries like Russia, China, and the United States, artists are employing cartography as a metaphor for the tensions that result from this shifting of allegiances. Léger's exhibit, then, locates itself within a body of recent international contemporary work that

(Facing page) Mathieu Léger
Methodologies for Tourists – An Ictus of Geology
or *The Inaccuracy of Getting Lost, Part Two* (installation detail)
action/performance
2014

through the medium of maps is drawing our attention to the ways in which cultural and national identities are neither innate nor inevitable; on the contrary, they are constructed and largely tenuous concepts.

The exhibit itself is modest by gallery standards, consisting of just three pieces accentuated by soft spot lighting. What's more, Léger gives his pieces the illusion of sculpture by adding texture to the two-dimensional prints and maps, rendering them seemingly three-dimensional. He also affords each piece considerable physical space within the gallery, heightening the symbolism of each piece, as well as drawing our attention to the spaces between them.



Mathieu Léger
*Methodologies for Tourists – Actions of Silence I (Expecting) Momentary Weakness
in the Wake of the Anticipation for Something Maritime (III)*
action/performance
2015

Two of the works are textured prints of the artist dressed in a high visibility suit, performing actions within an unidentified natural landscape; the first print depicts the artist attempting to move a boulder, the other of him plotting his own GPS coordinates. Although the medium of photography tends to render the active subject static, one is immediately struck by the way in which both pieces suggest ideas of movement and engagement. Furthermore, by placing himself within each piece while wearing such a vibrant orange suit, Léger is drawing our attention to a shared tension in each piece between familiarity and foreignness, between belonging and alienation. The symbolism behind such a decision is Léger's attempt to not

only highlight the fact that he is a foreign Other within the natural landscape: he is also making a philosophical statement about the role of the artists, simultaneously part of their art but also foreign to it. Of course, such tensions also speak to Léger's sensibility as an Acadian, as he seeks to understand the seemingly paradoxical state of him belonging to a definable culture without geographically delineated borders.

The third, and largest piece is a series of crumpled maps, arranged as a large rectangular print, the texturing of which echoes that of the other two prints in the exhibit— which were also crumpled, but then smoothed for the installation. The maps are mostly of European territories, an acknowledgement on the part of Léger as to his historical European roots. But this element is of secondary or even tertiary importance to the piece: the most compelling aspect of these maps, perhaps, is that they offer the illusion of being three-dimensional, as the crumpling effect imbues them with contour and physicality. In other words, this piece functions as a powerful post-modern reminder about the limiting nature of maps, that they are constructed spaces, artificial, two-dimensional renderings of real material



Mathieu Léger
Methodologies for Tourists – Measuring a Grid for the Surveyor's Contention
(installation)
action/performance
2015

landscapes in flux. Furthermore, because the maps are crumpled, their full meaning is obscured to the viewer – and so we are partly disoriented by the lack of cartographical clarity. On a symbolic level, then, Léger is drawing attention to the fact that we rely on maps not just to help us understand where we are, but also to tell us who we are as members of a province or nation – a luxury which Léger, as an Acadian, does not have. And since this is a reality for the artist, the crumpled maps also contain a political sub-text; Léger’s challenge to the very notion of cartography through this piece makes it a subtle form of personal protest against his culture’s historical displacement.

Taken individually, the three pieces which make up *Plausible Space* offer provocative commentaries on the artist’s relationship to his art, and to the limiting nature of cartography as a system for explaining who we are. Yet this is only part of the exhibit experience. Léger’s training in sculpture is evident in the arrangement of the three pieces; taken together, they are meant to make viewers keenly aware of space as a physical presence in the gallery. That is, when viewers enter the exhibit, they not only become aware that



Mathieu Léger
*Methodologies for Tourists – Actions of Silence / (Expecting) Momentary Weakness
in the Wake of the Anticipation for Something Maritime (I)*
action/performance
2015



Mathieu Léger
Espace Plausible • Plausible Space
mixed media installation
2016

they are entering into a defined space, but that they are also standing within that space. Moreover, because the three pieces are arranged in a triangular formation, viewers are unconsciously compelled – whether at first glance or after looking at the individual pieces – to move into the middle of the gallery space to view the exhibit as a whole, thus becoming resultant GPS coordinates of the exhibit itself. Paradoxically, viewers become the centre of the exhibit, and so must confront questions about their own identity; Léger effectively turns the lens on viewers and says, “I have shown you my interrogations and experience with space and territory. Where do you locate yourself in relation to these questions and challenges to identity, landscape, and borders?”



Léger's use of photographic prints and maps, then, are meant to draw the viewer's attention to ideas of the definitive, the definable, the categorical. Yet in his exhibit, he purposefully distorts the very categorical markers we rely on, forcing us to consider and/or speculate on the origins and accuracy of these pieces. Of course, there is also an element of the self-reflexive artist in this exhibit, since Léger's concept of space is not just an externalized, physical concept but also an interiorized, imaginative space that the artist must inhabit in order to create and which always contains the potential for art. Either way, one cannot simply view *Plausible Space* as a passive attendee: one must participate in its meaning, just as Léger is actively trying to understand where he belongs in the world as a modern Acadian artist.

(Facing page) Mathieu Léger
Methodologies for Tourists — Embracing Surficial Conditions or The Hesitation to Engage Spatiality
action/performance
2015



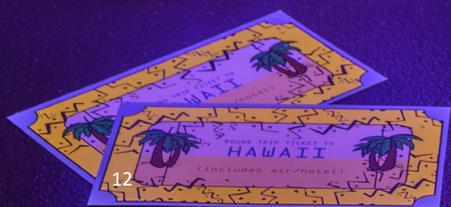
Mathieu Léger
Methodologies for Tourists – The Dissolution of Waiting (detail)
action/performance
2014

BIOGRAPHIES

Mathieu Léger is an interdisciplinary Moncton-based artist. To date, he has participated in fifty artist residencies both national and international. He holds a BA from the Université de Moncton. His work engages with notions of wilderness, geological time, and process as it relates to the natural world. He is currently developing a fifteen-year performance project that investigates the physicality of spatial awareness and cartographic conventions. Léger has exhibited across Canada and Europe with recent exhibitions at the Conference Centre Art Gallery (Charlottetown, CA), the New Brunswick Museum (Saint John, CA), and Centre 3 (Hamilton, CA).

Thomas Hodd is a cultural critic and Associate Professor of English at the Université de Moncton. His columns and essays have appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, the *Literary Review of Canada*, *Canadian Art*, and the *Toronto Star*, among others. He is the author of *#NOMORE NOTES* (Anstruther Press), and a member of the Editorial Board for the *Journal of New Brunswick Studies*. He is currently completing a critical edition of Flora MacDonald Denison's Ontario supernatural novel, *Mary Melville, the Psychic* (1900), as well as a selected edition of war stories by Nova Scotia author, Will R. Bird. His most recent publication is a chapter on the Fredericton school of Confederation writers for Tony Tremblay's *New Brunswick at the Crossroads: Literary Ferment and Social Change in the East* (WLUP).

LISA LIPTON



THE END: LIPTON'S EPIC JOURNEY COMES TO A CLOSE

TERESA CARLESIMO

In 2012 Lisa Lipton set off into the USA in search of meeting drummers, especially her idol at the time - visual artist, drummer and multi-instrumentalist Zach Hill. Like the beginning of so many engaging stories, however, things didn't go quite as planned. Unfortunately, Lipton never had the opportunity to meet Hill, and instead, following a brief journey through the States, became a resident in a live/work studio as part of Los Angeles's Art Share organization. It was from here that Lipton embarked on making what would become the epic docu-fiction, *THE IMPOSSIBLE BLUE ROSE*.

The portion filmed in Los Angeles would become the first of nine chapters. Titled *Room 95*, it takes its name from the jam space where Lipton would practice her drumming during her time in LA. Each of the nine chapters is filmed in a different location, relying heavily on collaboration from members of each local community. This unconventional process, rooted in both travel and community engagement, blurs the boundaries between fiction and fantasy and weaves together an offbeat version of a well-known story of youth, love, romance and the search for paradise. This blurring is taken further through an unusual mixing of scripted and ad-libbed dialogue, which belies the hyper-stylized nature of the character's costumes, sets and the cinematography.

The tone and feel of *THE IMPOSSIBLE BLUE ROSE* is familiar in that uncanny and unexpected way that tends to occur when art truly does seem to imitate life. Many scenes are dimly lit with the same atmospheric blue and purple hue that is woven throughout the film, while particular objects, characters, and elements of costume become familiar as they reappear from chapter to chapter. Most of these recurring features—such as fake, brightly painted

(Facing page) Lisa Lipton
Photo from *THE IMPOSSIBLE BLUE ROSE*
mixed media installation
2016



Lisa Lipton
Still from *THE IMPOSSIBLE BLUE ROSE*
(Signed, Your Loving Secret Admirer)
mixed media installation/performance
2015

fingernails, a martini glass with a mini umbrella, and palm tree motifs—speak to a different time and place. They are ambiguous, yet they are distinctly not here. Like memories that sometimes blur fact and fiction, there is a surreal nostalgia achieved through dated pop references and fashions, as well as through the dreamlike tone that runs so consistently through these chapters. This tone slightly shifts, however, within the final chapter, fittingly titled: *THE END*. Filmed in Kailua, Hawaii, *THE END* feels notably less spontaneous and more contemplative, as the unfolding exchange between art making and real life—between *THE IMPOSSIBLE BLUE ROSE* and Lipton herself—is brought, not to a close, but to a place of reflection. In the end there is not the neat resolution of a more conventional narrative, but the steady equanimity that often comes with age, or following a life-altering experience.

Lipton's keen attention to detail and control of certain aspects of the film while embracing the unforeseeable, has a peculiar resonance with my own memory and experience of youth. While it appears that the characters of the film are meant to reflect aspects of Lipton's alter-ego Frankie, so too do they seem to reflect myself at different points in my own life. In one's youth it is common to feel not entirely in control and many of the scenes seem to operate between a structured narrative and chaos. In this way *THE END* documents Lipton's last months of more than three years living and working on the road, but it also seems to signal a farewell to the fleeting romance of youthful self-discovery—a farewell to *THE IMPOSSIBLE BLUE ROSE*.



Lisa Lipton
Still from *THE IMPOSSIBLE BLUE ROSE* (Chapter IX – *THE END*)
mixed media installation/performance
2016



BIOGRAPHIES

Lisa Lipton is a Halifax-based multidisciplinary artist, musician and director who received her BFA from NSCAD and an MFA from the University of Windsor. Her projects explore the potential for crossing genres of film, mixed media installation, performance, theatre and music. Her visions are reflective of an interest in directorial and curatorial practices, collaboration and social interaction, as well as working within non-traditional contexts in order to explore the boundaries of performance and filmic production. She has exhibited her work on both a national and international level, and was on the longlist for the Sobey Art Awards, 2017.

Teresa Carlesimo is an interdisciplinary artist currently pursuing a PhD in Cultural Studies at Queen's University where her research considers various systems of power, class and empire as integral to the analysis of environmental damage. Recent and forthcoming exhibitions include Museum London, the Agnes Etherington Art Centre and the Thames Art Gallery, with forthcoming residencies in Barcelona, Spain and Reykjavík, Iceland where her work will address the visual culture of urbanization. Recent publications include *Public Journal*, *Art Papers* and *Blackflash*. She has exhibited throughout Canada and the US.

(Facing page) Lisa Lipton
Photograph from premiere of *THE IMPOSSIBLE BLUE ROSE* (Chapter IX – *THE END*)
mixed media performance
2016