Denis Lessard: Lives and works in Montreal. Since 1982, he has presented his performances and visual works in Canada, the United States, France and the Netherlands. He has also worked as an art critic, translator, guest curator and art history lecturer. Through his interdisciplinary practice, he has addressed issues about collecting, male identity, spirituality and the relationship between literature, music and the visual arts. He has participated in a number of residencies since 1987 developing themes of memory, history and communities in relation to the cities and places he explores. Over the last year Winnipeg-based publisher As We Try & Sleep Press has been producing Lessard’s Douze historiettes postcards and disseminating them internationally.

Kegan McFadden is a Winnipeg-based writer and artist whose practice is informed by questions of memory and its function and implication in socio-cultural contexts. During recently completed courses at Martha Street Studio, Kegan began to investigate where traditional printmaking techniques could meet conceptual applications. The series that was produced through MSS was premiered in a solo exhibition of McFadden’s at Malaspina Printmakers Association in Vancouver October 2012. Almost all of his projects incorporate text, and especially names, in order to question notions of memory and sentimentality in contemporary queer culture.

Jim Verburg is a citizen of Canada and the Netherlands, who currently lives and works in Toronto. His artistic practice is mainly concerned with the complexities of relationships. Working with photography, video, text, installation and print Verburg explores his love of modernist aesthetics, emotional matter and the interpersonal. He has held residencies at the National Film Board of Canada in Montreal, Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography in Toronto and the Beniff Centre for the Arts in Alberta. Recent exhibitions include Portrait Study at the New Stage of National Theatre in Prague, Domestic Queens at FOFA Gallery in Montreal, So Many Letdowns Before We Get Up at Platform in Winnipeg. Verburg’s solo show One and Two opened in the fall of 2011 at Le Mois de la Photo in Montreal. The show was awarded the 2011 Dazibao Prize.

Robin Metcalfe is a writer, critic and curator who works with a wide range of media and cultural practices, including visual arts, architecture, craft and design. His erotic fiction, poetry and essays have been published in 15 anthologies and more than sixty magazines, in five languages and on four continents. As a visual arts curator, he has organised such Queer-themed exhibitions as Queer Looking, Queer Acting: Lesbian and Gay Vernacular (MSVU Art Gallery, 1997). He has lectured widely, served on many award juries and edited several periodicals, serving as Editor-at-Large and Halifax correspondent for C Magazine from 1994 to 2001. He was Curator of Contemporary Art at Museum London, in Ontario, from 2001 to 2004, and since then been Directrice/Curator of Saint Mary’s University Art Gallery in Halifax.

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“Unparalleled, accessible facilities and education in the print arts”

Mission and Mandate

The Manitoba Printmakers Association maintains the heritage of excellence in printmaking while advancing artists and innovation through technique, education and community engagement at its sustainable Martha Street Studio facility.

Denis Lessard
Kegan McFadden
Jim Verburg

September 6 - October 18, 2013
Opening Reception
Friday, September 6th, 5pm
In Conversation
Saturday, September 7th, 2pm
Larry Glawson (host), Denis Lessard, Kegan McFadden
Workshop
Saturday, October 5th, 2:30 - 5:30pm (registration required)
In Your Own Hands with Kegan McFadden

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The exhibition intimacies presents works by three gay male artists, constituting three visual, or visual and textual, reflections on relationships.

Denis Lessard’s histories are the most directly intimate in their address. In each of this series of 12 postcards, mailed to selected recipients, he reproduces a drawing of the facial hair of one particular, unnamed man: just the facial hair; no other identifying features beyond the content of the accompanying text. Like the desiring subject who fetishises one aspect of the beloved, Lessard isolates the facial hair as an anchor of his desire. The drawings appear in dark ink against varying colours, many more or less pink or pinkish brown, and suggestive of skin tones, particularly those of bodily orifices. A short text appears on the other side of the postcard, a narrative describing an encounter with—and addressed to—the man to whom the facial hair presumably belongs. These remembered incidents range from a simple sighting of someone who aroused his interest, to a full personal encounter or relationship. The facial hair is embedded in the text, as well as in the image: “Avec ta barbe, tu ressembles à l’un des beaux rois de France.” In addressing this man whose beard resembles that of a “handsome king,” as in the other stories, Lessard uses the familiar form, “tu,” locating the addressee within a close range of affection. This also isolates the facial hair as the beloved, Lessard fetishises one aspect of the desiring subject who is attracted specifically to men with four-letter names—although one never knows. That their names are all four-letter words, and thus implicately establishes a cool distance from the subject of erotic exchange. Lessard’s beards generate a taxonomy of desire, McFadden’s prints of lists seem relics of a futile effort to retain the past. These are surely not all the men with four-letter names whom he had met, the order is only “approximate,” and the names themselves register unevenly in the printing process, reminding us more of the failures of memory than of its delights; of past encounters as objects of loss rather than cherished treasures. At the same time, the compulsive act of listing implies a (vain?) attempt to generate a score of conquests. Whereas Lessard’s beards generate a taxonomy of desire, McFadden’s decision to list only names of four letters applies a bureaucratic, arbitrary system to the organisation of personal recall. It seems unlikely that he is attracted specifically to men with four-letter names—although one never knows. That their names are all four-letter words, and thus implicitly indecent, alludes slyly to the possible sexual content of these encounters, without indicating whether this reflects their actual nature, or that of the artist’s (possibly frustrated) projected desires.

Jim Verburg’s Untitled (zero sum game) is the most abstract and minimal of the three works presented. His geometric forms (concentric circles, parallel lines within a circle), printed on folded sheets of paper, encounter each other across a narrow gap, like that between two people who are intimate. Part of a larger series in which Verburg has played with the optical patterns arising from similar, overlapping forms, they might represent the way that two individuals fit together to form a whole—or to cancel each other out. He leaves ambiguous the nature of an intimate encounter, whether it results in fulfilment or negation/frustration. Are these games “zero-sum” because all is resolved, or because nothing is achieved in the end? In tennis, the word “love” is attached to a score where the server has won two points and the receiver none: does someone have to win, and the other lose, for desire to be satisfied? Verburg leaves these questions unanswered, allowing the viewer to imagine the various ways his forms might encounter and interact with one another, and whether the result is a loss or a gain.

Verburg’s printworks are mechanically reproduced and crisply geometric, establishing a cool distance from the subject of erotic exchange. Lessard’s are photomechanical prints of hand-drawn images and diaristic texts: a personal touch at one step removed. McFadden’s retain, in the printing process, some of the chance characteristics of intimate contact, its hit-and-miss engagement between two surfaces. Each work, by each artist, could be seen as a billet-doux, a “sweet note” or love letter, whether to the absent, imagined, remembered (or half-forgotten) beloved, or to the person seeing and reading the image and text.

Kegan McFadden. Untitled (zero sum game). 2011. Silkscreen, varied edition, 1 of 56. 8”x10”