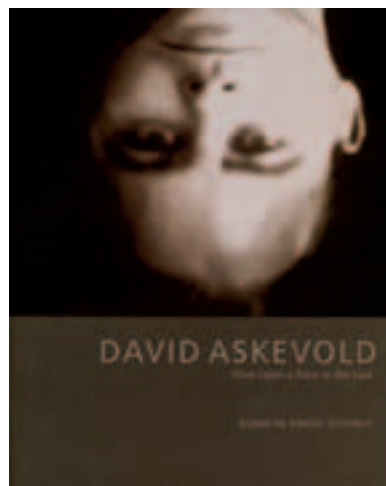


de la nature semblait avoir été résolue une fois pour toutes avec l'invention de l'appareil photo » (p. 46). Le lecteur sera peut-être agacé, également, du traitement réservé à certaines citations introduites abruptement, sans que leur auteur soit indiqué, occasionnant ainsi, par moment, des ruptures qui obligent à consulter les notes en fin de volume. Les suppléments d'une bibliographie et d'un index auraient également été utiles.

Les historiens d'art, qui trouveront, dans ce livre, un supplément intéressant aux ouvrages consacrés à ce jour au peintre automatiste et à son œuvre, s'attendent peut-être aussi, comme moi, à ce que l'auteur y articule les données contextuelles qu'il avait élaborées dans *Sortir de la Grande Noirceur. L'horizon personaliste de la Révolution tranquille*, afin de saisir le lien qui les unissait et la pensée de Borduas. Ce manque constitue, peut-être, le seul maillon fragile de *L'Art vivant. Autour de Paul-Émile Borduas*, qui offre néanmoins un élargissement contextuel appréciable pour cette étude consacrée à l'artiste. C'est pourquoi je propose à mes collègues de conjuguer la lecture de *L'Art vivant* à celle du précédent ouvrage, qui en devient un complément solide et éclairant. Les détours interdisciplinaires qu'ils offrent tous deux permettent non seulement d'élargir la perspective sociohistorique des courants révolutionnaires québécois, mais également de fournir de nouveaux outils de réflexion sur certains aspects des parcours ardues et des non-dits qui sous-tendent la trame de la mémoire collective dissidente et évolutive.



David Askeveld: Once Upon a Time in the East

DAVID DIVINEY (ED.)

Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 2011

141 p.

Adam Lauder

David Askeveld (1940–2008) is internationally-recognized for his innovations in pedagogy. In the early 1970s his legendary Projects Class brought leading contemporary artists from the United States to work with students at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax – a jiu jitsu-like move that contributed to the rapid transformation of previously marginal Halifax into an important node in a newly global art network. However, when reports of the artist's untimely death circulated in 2008, his artistic legacy seemed to be less well-defined. Produced in conjunction with a retrospective exhibition of the same

title curated by editor David Diviney and organized by the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, *David Askevold: Once Upon a Time in the East* is a fruitful first assessment of the artist's elusive career as an artist and a teacher. Yet, as contributor Peggy Gale, who is a long-time observer of Askevold's work, openly admits, at the end of this particular project, "we remain unable to take the full measure of David Askevold" (55). The special achievement of *David Askevold* is to seize upon the contradictions and unresolved tensions that define Askevold's practice as an entry point for broader reflections on the paradoxes of conceptualism itself. At once logical and aleatory, Askevold's work emerges from this account as a synecdoche of conceptualism's founding fictions.

This dynamic emerges most forcefully from Ray Cronin's canny pairing of Askevold and conceptual founding father Sol LeWitt. If the New York conceptualist's mantra, "the idea becomes a machine that makes the art,"¹ has come to signify an art of logical rules and sober, documentary formats, the LeWitt cited by Cronin is perplexingly irrational, even mystical. In a similar spirit, Cronin observes that Askevold was repeatedly drawn to paranormal subject matter precisely for its capacity to undermine photography's pretensions to documentary transparency. The 1974–79 series *The Poltergeist*, a collaboration with Mike Kelley (1954–2012), appropriates conventions of nineteenth-century spirit photography to record that which inherently resists documentation.

Such manoeuvres trouble modernist pieties of medium specificity as well as complacent readings of conceptualism as an art of facticity or 'documentation' narrowly defined.

Cronin's text also serves as an introduction to the vernacular discontents of Askevold's vexing oeuvre; for instance, the American-born artist's unlikely engagement with country singer Hank Williams. Viewed through Cronin's anti-essentialist lens, the artist's weird amalgam of performance, spirit conjuring, and video documentation no longer reads as deviation from the straight and narrow path of conceptualism, but rather as an important point of continuity with the narrative tactics of a subsequent generation of neo-conceptualists.

Peggy Gale revisits Askevold's media production, with particular emphasis on the Super 8 and video production with which the artist is probably most closely identified after his pedagogical experiments. Given that Askevold's students recorded several of the films and their improvised structure is consistent with the exploratory framework of his teaching, associations between the Projects Class and the artist's moving image work are well warranted. As Gale cautions, the apparent simplicity of these works is deceptive: the Super 8 films in fact document performances that were elaborate, if open-ended. Gale's text is at its most insightful when exploring continuities between the performance elements of Askevold's videos and the central role of narrative in his photo-

text pieces of the mid-1970s. Askevold, Gale reminds us, was an important contributor to the short-lived Story Art movement associated with the John Gibson Gallery in New York, whose impact on subsequent, narrative-based art has yet to be fully evaluated.

Gale rightly emphasizes that Askevold's art deliberately frustrates narrative closure but the tone of her assessment of the artist's tangential tactics sometimes verges on exasperation. While this faithfully reproduces the response that a first-time encounter with Askevold's work can inspire, this impact is conveyed at the expense of depth in Gale's analysis. The work of retracing connections between Askevold's marginal stratagems and the decentering tactics of the younger generation in whose formation he played a leading role is left to American artists Aaron Brewer and Tony Oursler.

Brewer presents a brilliant gloss on Askevold's politically-charged engagement with game theory at the height of the Vietnam War. Although the mathematics of two-person games emerged as a distinct field of study in the first half of the twentieth century, its most celebrated problem: the zero-sum game known as *prisoner's dilemma*, was developed by two employees of the military think-tank RAND in 1950. Brewer argues that the agonistic logic of *prisoner's dilemma* speaks to RAND's application of game theory to problems in foreign policy during the Cold War. Game theory also served as the basis for some of Askevold's earliest and most celebrated language games, such

as his 1968 sculpture *3 Spot Game* and the schematic language work *Shoot Don't Shoot* (1970), with which he was represented at the seminal MoMA exhibition *Information* in 1970. Brewer's delirious analysis is at its paranoid best when uncovering parallels between the analogical systems of California occultists and neighbouring RAND Corporation employees. The mazy logic of Brewer's analysis itself speaks to the impact of Askevold's practice more persuasively than any scholarly study of his influence ever could. However, the author's marshalling of the political associations of game theory in support of an activist reading of Askevold's practice challenges the reader's suspension of disbelief.

Oursler's compact text is the most illuminating in the collection. He was a student of Askevold at CalArts and a collaborator on the late found-image project *Two Beasts* (2007–10), left unfinished at the time of Askevold's death. Oursler sheds new light on Askevold's five-year stint at the centre of the conceptual scene in Southern California during the late 1970s. Known for his own fractured narratives and haunting installations, Oursler insightfully situates works by Askevold, such as *Kepler's Music of the Spheres Played by Six Snakes* (1971–74) and *The Ghost of Hank Williams* (1979), as "prototypical of the art that would be produced later by my generation and the following one" (110).

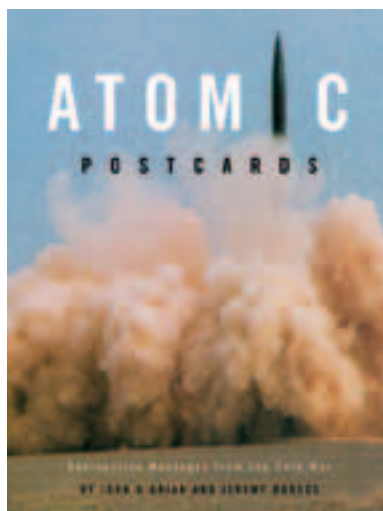
Interviews between Askevold and artists Mario Garcia Torres and Richard Hertz allow the reader to hear the artist

in his own words (or, at any rate, a respectful paraphrasing thereof). Hertz's interview is re-worked into a first-person narrative that blurs the boundary between fact and fiction in a fashion recalling Askevold's own destabilizing moves. A text by Los Angeles-based curator Irene Tsatsos about Askevold's computer-generated series from the 1990s, inspired by the mythology of Halifax Harbour, rounds out the collection.

David Askevold: Once Upon a Time in the East is required reading for anyone engaged in the current project of recovering the history of Conceptual art in Canada as well as those interested in challenging received ideas about the movement as a whole. The book offers a provocative, if uneven, portrait of an artist who has (so far) evaded the critical attention he deserves. The texts are most illuminating in those sections that follow the artist's lead by blending biography and myth. It is an unfortunate commentary on the state of Canadian art criticism and scholarship that an artist who did so much to put Canada on the map appears to be best understood by American artists.

NOTES

- 1 Sol LEWITT, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5:10 (Summer 1967): 80.



Atomic Postcards: Radioactive Messages from the Cold War

JOHN O'BRIAN AND
JEREMY BORSOS

Bristol, UK and Chicago, USA:
Intellect, University of Chicago
Press, 2011
188 p.

Blake Fitzpatrick

"Wish you were here" takes on a dark and unsettling irony when discovered on the reverse side of a postcard depicting an atomic blast. In *Atomic Postcards: Radioactive Messages from the Cold War*, readers are presented with an opportunity to reflect upon the ways in which Cold War nuclear experience is visualized, commented, or left unsaid through the recto/verso of postcard images. In general, postcards tend to be folksy and humble photographic forms. In *Atomic Postcards*, a juxtaposition