

Notes from the Editor

Pamela McCallum

During the summer of 2001 an exhibition of art, *Museopathy*, held at different sites in Kingston, Ontario, explored the interaction between the global gestures of contemporary art and specific local sites. One of the most striking pieces in the exhibition was an installation sculpture, *Isolated Depiction of the Passage of Time*, by the Canadian artist Brian Jungen, exhibited at the Correctional Services of Canada Museum in the Kingston Penitentiary. Onto the shape of an industrial shipping pallette, beautifully constructed in red cedar, Jungen stacked twelve columns of plastic trays, normally unregarded objects encountered day to day in cafeterias and fast food restaurants. The bright colours—orange, yellow, mauve, red—combine and recombine to produce ribbons of colour, a fanciful play of shadings and contrast, much like the minimalist art of the 1960s which stressed the “objecthood” of art, often condensing sculpture to basic geometric shapes and tones. At the same time that Jungen situates *Isolated Depiction of the Passage of Time* within the minimalist tradition, inviting viewers to marvel at the complex patterning of the columns of trays, he constructs a compelling narrative about law, race, imprisonment and the continuing effects of colonization. The number of trays is not simply a playful mixture of structure and colour. Instead, it represents the disproportionately large number of First Nations men who are in Canadian prisons, men with whom he shares indigenous ancestry. The colours are coded to the categories of sentences they are serving. In raising the issue of the many indigenous men incarcerated within the prison system of a former settler colony, Jungen politicizes minimalist aesthetics and challenges viewers to think through the reasons why so many indigenous men are imprisoned. Such a process of questioning might elicit a reconsideration of the title: while *Isolated Depiction of the Passage of Time* unquestionably evokes the monotonous existence of the prisoner, it also opens up into a consideration

of the “passage of time” in the five centuries since the settlement of the Americas. But this is not all. The hollow interior of the sculpture evokes an imaginative bid for freedom by a Canadian inmate who hid inside stacked dining hall trays to escape when they were taken outside the prison walls. In the interior of the sculpture a television set, visible only by the dim glow of its screen, plays and replays the popular 1963 film *The Great Escape*, a paradigmatic narrative about longings that circulate within prisons, and other social institutions.

Jungen’s extraordinary artwork is a remarkable reflection on the intersection of postcolonial existence and structures of the law; it is an exceptional representative of the range of creative works that engage these pressing questions. *ARIEL* is honoured to publish this special issue on “Law, Literature, Postcoloniality” edited by Cheryl Suzack and Gary Boire. One of the key issues in postcolonial studies has always been an intervention into the master narratives of the colonizer, and law is undoubtedly one of the crucial discourses that circulate around histories of colonization. Suzack and Boire have brought together a series of articles that explore significant issues in constitutional law, identity politics, human rights, narrative representations, the construction of the colonial subject and more. Even at the time when interdisciplinary conversations have long been recognized as a cornerstone of postcolonial studies, the scope of disciplinary perspectives included here cannot fail to be impressive: law, discourse theory, international studies, communications, literary studies, anthropology, philosophy—to offer only a partial list.

The editorial board of *ARIEL* is grateful for the efforts of the guest editors and contributors who have produced “Law, Literature, Postcoloniality.” We hope that this special issue will spark spirited discussions and further research on these crucial issues for postcolonial studies.