

DRUGS, GANGS, MURDER: THE CASE AGAINST PROHIBITION

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# Canadian DIMENSION

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FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD

VOLUME 43 N°4 | JULY / AUGUST 2009

*the*  
**QUEER  
ISSUE**

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NOAM GONICK  
KENT MONKMAN *and*  
ADRIAN STIMSON  
*discuss*

**TWO-SPIRIT  
IN ABORIGINAL  
CULTURE**

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**TRANSGRESSING  
TRANS**

DISPLAY UNTIL AUG 31 2009





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## The Corvin Russell Paragraph



### The End Of Electoralism in Canada, for Now

THE RECENT BC ELECTION marks a low-water mark, of sorts, for left-wing electoralism in Canada. The BC NDP ran one of the most cynical, crassly opportunist, right-wing campaigns a party of the left has ever run in Canada. Whatever the rationale behind it, their slogan, “axe the tax,” spoke in the language of the right; their crime platform, heavy on beefed-up law enforcement, was straight out of a neo-con playbook. No doubt the carbon tax, like the NDP’s own cap-and-trade proposal, is an ineffective, market-based solution to the pressing problem of carbon emissions. But when we are fighting to get even the slightest measures on climate change enacted in policy, arguing against the carbon tax is reactionary in effect. (Competing to match the NDP’s dismal practice, well-known environmentalists like Tzeporah Berman subordinated all other principles to the carbon tax and gave high profile endorsements to the BC Liberals, one of the most vicious neoliberal governments in the country.)

Can anyone now say with a straight face that the NDP, whether provincially or federally, is developing bold, alternative ideas that match the scale of the many crises we are facing? This party is no longer a place where alternative conceptions of the world are developed and mobilized for. Nor does it have the potential to become that place. The party has gutted party democracy and is increasingly professionalized. Beyond vague “progressivism,” the party has no ideology. Its apparatchiks are obsessed with media approval and short-term poll driven positioning: they will never go out on a limb to shift the terms of debate. Israel’s slaughter in Gaza was a case where vast numbers of Canadians had no voice in Parliament because the NDP was terrified of taking the principled position.

Still more depressing than the BC elections was the resounding defeat of electoral reform there after its near victory four years ago. This has killed the hope of electoral reform in Canada for a generation, closing a space where creative new electoral alternatives could develop. Now more than ever we need mass organizations that pose alternatives to capitalism. We do not yet know what these will look like, but they will arise outside the current party system. We must begin the long work of building them — now.

\*\*\*\*\*  
CORVIN RUSSELL is a freelance political organizer and writer, and a popular educator with the Catalyst Centre in Toronto. He has worked in the global justice, environmental justice, democracy, Indigenous solidarity and anti-war movements.

## Canadian DIMENSION

www.canadiandimension.com

**PUBLISHER & COORDINATING EDITOR**  
Cy Gonick

**ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER**  
James Patterson

**PUBLISHING ASSISTANT**  
Chris Webb

**ART DIRECTOR**  
Galen Johnson

**LITERARY EDITOR**  
Brenda Austin-Smith

**COVER**  
Evergon

**PROOFREADER & COPY EDITOR**  
Ed Janzen (at large)  
Jo Snyder (acting)

**INTERN**  
Aaron Zeghers

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CANADIAN DIMENSION  
2E-91 Albert Street  
Winnipeg, MB, Canada, R3B 1C5  
PHONE: 204-957-4539  
FAX: 204-943-4617  
info@canadiandimension.com



### CANADIAN DIMENSION'S EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

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### IN THIS DIMENSION

The Queer Issue? CD out of the closet? Not really. In its own way CD has always been queer. You know what we mean. Daring to question the basic assumptions of Canadian society and surviving as an anti-capitalist magazine for nearly a half-century is definitely queer. As the intro to the queer focus says, “To queer something is to disrupt it, to put it under scrutiny and to attempt to change it.” That’s what CD has always been about. The intro goes on to say, queer has long ago “ceased to be singularly about sex and gender becoming instead a dynamic of sex and gender in relation to and action with class, race, ethnicity and regionality in the global context.”

That’s how CD does queer in this issue. We thank our guest editors Shannon Bell, Noam Gonick and Dan Irving for joining us in putting our first queer issue together.

We continue our ongoing analysis of the economic crisis with contributions from Maurice Dufour and Radhika Desai and Allan Freeman. And retired judge Jerry Paradis offers a radical solution to BC’s gang drug wars: end prohibition! Our editorial takes a shot at the flimsy climate change offerings of all of BC’s political parties and outlines our bold ecosocialist alternative.

### NEXT ISSUE

The September/October issue of CD focuses on immigration and on some of the exciting new formations of resistance the economic crisis has thrown up in this country.

### CD’s NEWLY REDESIGNED WEB SITE

In case you haven’t noticed we’ve got a brand-new website. The new [canadiandimension.com](http://canadiandimension.com) looks fantastic and is updated daily with a mix of Blogs, Articles, Alert Radio, Best of the Web and Daily Links. We think it’s a great improvement and we hope you find it more navigable and user-friendly.

## This Dimension



### OUR OWN FINANCIAL CRISIS

Canadian Dimension is not immune to the economic crisis, which is why you’ll have received in the mail our urgent financial appeal in the mail. We need your help to keep publishing the top-notch investigative journalism and critical analysis that we’re known for. One in four subscribers donates to Dimension and we greatly appreciate your help. We’re asking you again to give what you can in order to keep this venerable publication on the presses and in your hands.

### THE OTTAWA CD BENEFIT: BEST EVER

Thanks to the Canadian Dimension crew in Ottawa! Their May, 9th Canadian Dimension fundraising dinner with guest speaker Jim Stanford was a great success. “Some 135 people heard Jim Stanford’s insightful and entertaining talk about the character of capitalism followed by an animated discussion about what the left should do now,” veteran CD benefit organizer Nick Aplin has informed us.

“As well we heard about the crisis in Sri Lanka and the plight of the Tamil people living there,” he reported. “In addition we learned from Joan Kuyek about a recent victory by Mining Watch Canada in federal court which will require mining companies to inform the public about annual releases of toxins in mine wastes including tailings- through reporting to the National Pollutant Release Inventory.”

Organizers of the Ottawa event were Bob Allen, Nick Aplin, Geoff Bickerton, Ken Clavette, Yvonne Demalpas, Gil Levine, Peter Mix, Marie Mullally, Blanche Roy, Jane Stinson.

Want to organize a CD fund raising event in your town? Let us know and we will get you started: 204. 957.1519.

[www.canadiandimension.com](http://www.canadiandimension.com)



# TOBARON WAXMAN'S POST-QUEER PALETTE

By SHANNON BELL

# T

OBARON WAXMAN is an interdisciplinary, multi-media artist whose work in all its manifold forms (sound, installation, performance, video) queers identity. Shannon Bell talked with Tobaron in NYC, March 1 as he was installing his endurance performance installation "Block of ice + 1/60" at Harvestworks for SoHo Night, Armory Arts Week.

**Shannon Bell:** You are considered one of the two best-known Female-To-Male (FTM) trans artists in the world. There is Del La Grace Volcano and there is Tobaron Waxman. I know Del identifies as an intersex and trans, but you don't foreground transgender/transsexual identity in your work. For instance, someone seeing "Still Life: Israel Eats Itself" (2008) would not see an identity of trans.

**Tobaron Waxman:** I'm not sure if that's true...! But I am very fond of Del and very flattered. If it has to do with identity it is about the complications of masculinity. In the case of Israel, the national narrative feeds itself on a certain kind of masculinity that gradually falls apart as people are forced to realize that it is a very two dimensional thing. The state creates a gender and then cannibalizes it.

Trans is part of a palette I work with. I have more of a community with people who I share esthetic and political interests with and less about identity per se. I would find community around empathy.

**SB:** I love the expansive land/body understanding of queer that you give in the context of your work. In a previous interview you say: "... 'The Land' is described in particularly gendered and corporeal terms, and trying to imagine how my queer body could be a part of

"THE STATE CREATES  
A GENDER AND THEN  
CANNIBALIZES IT."

that conversation. ...To reconsider the image of "The Land" without imposing a binary would rework the entire definition of the space, and make a gesture in solidarity with a number of liberation struggles. Traditional Jewish metatexts could be read to indicate that the omnipresence of G-d precludes the border as an obsolete, human foible worth transcending, because the same sacred entity is equally as present both on, around and permeating the border. ... Implicates the locus of "border" as a binary—and based only in fear, control, and the human need to establish an order. My experience would indicate that the same rationale is the source of anxiety regarding gender, land, and anything else people feel the need to separate and control."

Your work has touched on Jewishness for quite awhile, I am thinking of the beautiful performance installation, "Opshernish" (2000), in which your waist-length hair was connected to the ceiling and gallery visitors cut your locks, and finally shaved your head.



**TW:** "Opshernish" will be installed at The Jewish Museum of New York (Fall 2009). My "Opshernish" was nine years ago. By the time it gets to The Jewish Museum it is a ten year-old box of hair. "Opshernish" is part of Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life.

**SB:** Religious head shaving occurs again in your work, in "Diaspora NYC" (2003), in which a heavily tattooed muscled young man is both embracing and giving a Jewish haircut to another man. To me this is a queer Jewish image.

**Queer by Contagion**

**TW:** "Diaspora NYC" just showed in a very masculine, very gay show in Chelsea, called "Dark Rooms/Homme Made." I was nervous to have "Diaspora NYC" in this particular show which included piles of cocks all over the place and my head-shaving image...! I felt very shy and Victorian. "Diaspora NYC" was placed right next to a block of used condoms by the sublime FrankoB. I was flattered but nervous.

**SB:** I have known you for a very long time and you haven't had much trouble with piles of cocks.

**TW:** As the maker of the image, my tzitzis are hanging out in the company of all these cocks hanging out.

**SB:** "Diaspora NYC" is really radical. You can see gay cocks hanging out all the time, but you don't see this type of image.

**TW:** If the image is transgressive it's because empathy is so taboo. I don't think there is anything immediately homoerotic about this image. Everyone looks and needs to project all kinds of other issues onto these bodies—about gayness, skinheads and Jews.

**SB:** Putting it in a show next to British gay artist FrankoB's condom piece makes it gay?

**TW:** You are suddenly queer by contagion again, by the company you are keeping. Neither of the males in the image are read as trans. They are read as "gay."

**SB:** Your huge triptych "Amidah" (2004), my all time favorite of all your work, I read as queer trans Jewish bodies in prayer. To me queer trans happens with the layers of difference in this prayer piece: Jewishness, nudity, religion, masculinity, motion. The mix queers trans so it is not simply an issue of the gendered body. I guess you could call it post-identity, but I like queer trans.

**Post-Identity, Post Jewish, Post-Zionist**

**TW:** (laughing) Post-identity gets my vote. Post-Jewish, Post-Zionist.

**SB:** In your Fear of a Bearded Planet project, there is a series of souvenir portraits and a postcard image of a

bearded man (you) and the Bethlehem checkpoint. Can the man be Jewish and Arab?

**TW:** The viewer doesn't know the identity of the person, only that it is a bearded person. In terms of the region the person could be Christian or Muslim or Jewish. The figure wears an ID card from Maschom Watch, an organization of peace activist Israeli women against the Israeli Occupation of the territories. The ID card is written in English, Arabic and Hebrew.

The "Fear of a Bearded Planet" postcard is composed as a greeting card that I send out at Easter and Christmas. The card is a loaded text: there is the audacious civic banner at the Bethlehem checkpoint that says "Peace be With You," there is the wall, the multi-religious identified bearded man and there is the Maschom Watch identification card. It was presumed that I was Muslim because what would an orthodox Jewish man be doing there.

When I travel, I go to the souvenir portrait drawers. When they ask where I'm from, I say, "Guess." 🍷



**Further Reading**  
FrankoB (<http://www.franko-b.com>)  
Del La Grace Volcano (<http://www.delagravolcano.com>)  
Tobaron Waxman (<http://www.tobaron.com>)  
Tobaron Waxman interview with Katrien Jacobs. Hong Kong Salon Sex-change. Magazine #1, 2006-2007. City University of Hong Kong publication  
Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life curated by Daniel Belasco. Jewish Museum of New York, September 23, 2009  
February 7, 2010. <http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/exhibitions/reinventingritual>  
Dark Rooms/Homme Made curated by Avi Feldman for Danyel Mahmood Gallery, NYC <http://daneymahmood.com/darkrooms.html>

FACING PAGE  
Tobaron Waxman.  
Fear, 2008.

THIS PAGE  
Tobaron Waxman.  
Diaspora NYC, 2003.