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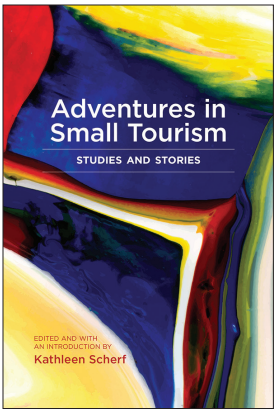

ADVENTURES IN SMALL TOURISM: STUDIES AND STORIES

Edited and with an Introduction by Kathleen Scherf

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Artistic Micro-Adventures in Small Places

Donald Lawrence

Introduction

In 2014 I was invited to contribute a project to Art Marathon, an annual festival of artists' projects and events organized by Eastern Edge Gallery in St. John's, Newfoundland. Since renamed "Holdfast," the festival presented a dynamic mix of activities in and around the gallery, including the ground level of an adjacent parkade, and at off-site locations around the older part of town. Being a participating artist during Art Marathon parallels my experience of participating in two other similar events: in 2008 as a participating artist in Ice Follies, a biennale organized by the W. K. P. Kennedy Gallery in North Bay, Ontario, and as the lead artist/researcher of the Midnight Sun Camera Obscura Festival, realized in Dawson City, Yukon, in 2015, in partnership with the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture. A consideration of what these three events may offer for small tourism in small places—for the opportunity presented by such art-activated activities—is what I take up here. I do not undertake anything like a sociological study of tourists' responses to these projects. Rather, I am drawing upon what I have created as my own contributions to these events, what I have observed of visitors' interactions with these projects, and a sampling of other projects and visitors' responses to them from these same events.

These three events have much in common, including a basic interest in bringing a performative dimension to the viewer's experience; each of the events takes a chance on foregrounding projects that are being realized for the first time, effectively collapsing the idea of experimentation and

dissemination into a single moment. Often, there is no rehearsal. For both the artist and the viewer there is something adventurous in this and the condensed duration of events like these suggests a parallel to the "micro-adventure," a term and a pursuit made popular in 2014 by the British adventurer Alastair Humphreys. A micro-adventure is characterized as having "the spirit (and therefore the benefits) of a big adventure; it's just all condensed into a weekend away, or even a midweek escape from the office" (2014, 14). The way that viewers, including tourists, are invited to take a chance on entering into something unexpected, sometimes becoming participants themselves, is in the spirit of Humphreys' idea, to push people to take the chance to experience something outside their comfort zones.

By way of these events, tourists and other "normal people with real lives" are given, or sometimes stumble upon, the opportunity to learn something of contemporary art, a realm that they may consider to be for other people, but that they might welcome and perhaps engage in when encountering it unexpectedly.

For the purposes of this contribution I am taking "tourists" to be those who have come from somewhere other than the host communities of these arts events. Typically this may mean a small number of such visitors, perhaps at times not many more than the collective number of event organizers and participating artists themselves. In this case, several opportunities and challenges may be kept in mind. First, the context of this volume may simply be a good opportunity to call attention to such arts events as these for practitioners and scholars of tourism, in the hopes of interesting tourism promoters in small arts festivals. Second, in some respects, these sorts of events work best because they are organized by a small collaborative network in a local community, including artists, and perhaps some artists from other places. The tourists, maybe small in number, who purposefully or otherwise find themselves in the middle of such events, will experience something special, something genuinely experimental and/or local in conception—often a one-time-only experience. Third, though the artists and curators who come from away to participate in such events may not be tourists in the typical sense, they are often highly engaged visitors to such communities, contributing to local economies and intent on building important linkages between small places, networks comprising members of an extended cultural community, which may be an important ingredient for the sustainability of small tourism in small places.

My own artistic practice in recent years includes two primary interests. First, it is an exploration of simple, pre-photographic optical principles and apparatuses, including the creation of projects that invite participants to gain an embodied, multi-sensory experience of early image formation. Second, in some of these projects, I look at the meeting place of urban culture—of art, early forms of popular entertainment, etc.—and the culture of outdoor recreation, for which Humphreys' concept of the micro-adventure is particularly analogous in some instances. The specific, historical form of the public camera obscura informs some of the projects that I consider in this contribution, so an explanation of these structures is a good place to start.

Cameras Obscura

Latin for "dark room," a camera obscura is in essence a darkened space into which light is admitted by way of a lens or open aperture, with an image of whatever surrounds the structure cast inside by this simple means, much like the formation of an image inside one's own eye. The projected image will be upside down and inverted, cast on a wall or cast downwards onto a circular table via a mirror, and perhaps with a rotating optical apparatus to provide a moving, panoramic image. In its simple form as a darkened room, the camera obscura's image represents an early form of optical projection, the forerunner of all such optical technology developed over the past five hundred years or so, and smaller, portable cameras obscura are the forerunner of the modern camera. Knowledge of this history is of course not essential to know in relation to most contemporary artistic practices that a visitor will encounter, but it does inform some of the artworks considered in this essay, and there is a connection to the development of modern tourism that may be mentioned here. Having emerged in Chinese, Islamic, and ancient Greek cultures, and while being an advanced imaging technology in early modern Europe, the camera obscura was eclipsed by emerging technologies—including photography—by the mid-nineteenth century. However, at just the time when the camera obscura's usefulness to science declined, modern tourism emerged in the nineteenth century with an expanding middle class, enhanced options for travel, etc. In this climate, walk-in public cameras obscura began to populate seaside and other popular locations for tourists to take in the surrounding view. If no longer "advanced technology" during the latter nineteenth century, the walk-in camera obscura was a popular means of seeing a live, moving image and doing so in advance of the invention and popularity of film

over the next decade or two. Sometimes aligned with the interests of another phenomenon, that of amateur astronomers, and sometimes identified as "observatories," these early multimedia sites inhabited the tops of converted towers or took the form of small, pavilion-like buildings. Many such cameras obscura continued to be built or existed well into the twentieth century, and there are a few extant examples from around that time.

Occasionally I combine art making and related research interests with purposeful travel, with particular historical sites as a destination. In the pre-COVID summer of 2019 I made such a trip, visiting and studying cameras obscura in Greenwich and Bristol and on the Isle of Man, creating studies and detailed measurements of these places along the way. The Clifton Observatory in Bristol is a good and extant example of a nineteenth-century camera obscura in which visitors wind their way to the top of a repurposed tower, entering into a darkened space at the top. A circular, and slightly dish-shaped table fills the middle of the space, with an image of the surrounding landscape projected across its surface. The image is cast by way of a simple optical housing at the top of the tower, comprising a mirror and one or more lenses, with the optical housing being rotated 360 degrees. Captivating today for the very lucid, somewhat dream-like quality of the projected image that results when an image is pure light, unmediated by anything more than the lens and mirror, the effect would likely have been even more alluring for the burgeoning number of tourists in the nineteenth century, with these early spectacles of media culture emerging alongside the still new medium of photography, the photographic album, and the yet-to-emerge medium of film. The postcards seen here of the Clifton Observatory and the interior of a similar camera obscura in Dumfries, Scotland (in which an attendant continues the long-standing practice of offering a guided tour of the town by way the projected image), also evidences the role that the production and circulation of printed images has played in the network of tourist sites that includes these cameras obscura.

Playing off the tradition of such structures I realized the Nanton Camera Obscura in partnership with the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery between 2016 and 2019, at the university's Coutt's Centre for Western Canadian Heritage, on a farm a few miles east of Nanton, Alberta. Nanton is a centre for the surrounding farming communities and a popular tourist destination for its many antique stores, historical buildings and museums, and for its general smalltown appeal. I've had the opportunity to show the camera obscura to

Figure 8.1: Great Union Camera Obscura (1892), Douglas Head, Isle of Man.

Source: On-site journal study by author, 2019.

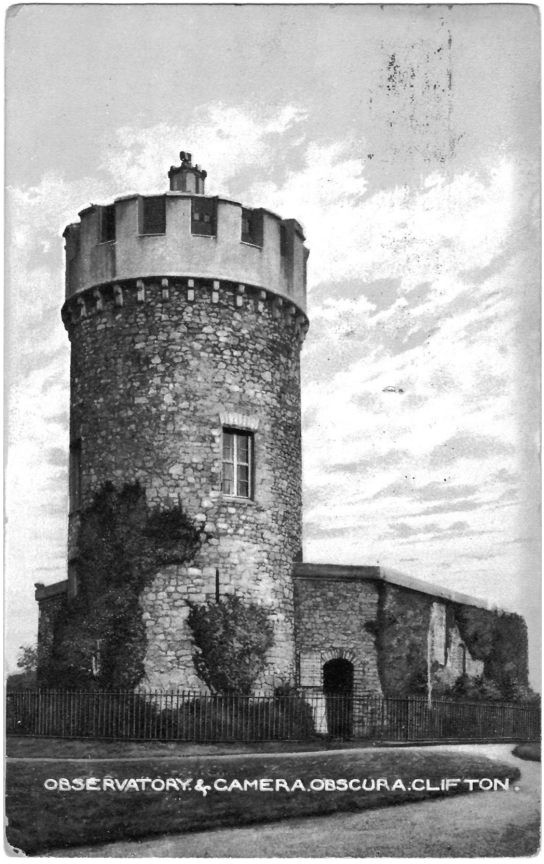


Figure 8.2: Clifton Observatory and Camera Obscura (1828), Bristol, England, postcard, ca. 1900.

Source: Author.

many visitors, whether they have come from such close-by centres as Calgary and Lethbridge or from anywhere else.

What is experienced inside is a surprise for most visitors, particularly as the outward appearance of the structure is generally utilitarian, a corrugated steel grain bin similar in design to ones seen across the farmlands, but small in comparison to most for being one of the earliest on the western Prairies, dating to 1927. Some visitors first wonder about the system of rough gearing on the roof, and perhaps see the optical structure at the top rotating if others are inside already operating the gearing. The rotating lens seems to be as much a magnet to bring people inside as the nearby, somewhat jovial roadside making the claim that this is the "World's Most Corrugated Camera Obscura" (punning off the language and visual culture of tourism learned

Figure 8.3: Dumfries Camera Obscura (1836), Dumfries, Scotland, postcard, ca. 1970s.
Source: Author.

early, during family road trips). Once inside, visitors experience something else, as Louise Barrett has described:

> Once the door is closed . . . and the room darkens, the space is utterly transformed: an image suddenly appears before you on the table—an image that seems to glow from within, with a brilliant, painterly quality. There is a moment of genuine wonder as you realize that the prairie grasses in this "painting" are actually blowing gently in the wind, and you recognize that what you're seeing is not a still life, but the moving image of the landscape outside. (2021, 289)

Figure 8.4: Donald Lawrence, "Nanton Camera Obscura," Coutts Centre for Western Canadian Heritage, Nanton, Alberta, 2019.

Source: Author.

Entering the camera obscura is for some visitors an easy decision, while for others it is taking a chance. Many, perhaps most, first-time visitors do not know what is inside but come away with a new experience. Interior signage, information handouts, and, for some, guided tours offer visitors the opportunity to learn something of the basic principles of image formation, including in the human eye, the historical roots of the imaging devices and technology that are so ubiquitous today, and how such structures relate to the origins of modern tourism. Thus "entertainment"—the default assumption of traditional tourism's objective—and the more contemporary tourism interests of education and transformation are brought together as one experience, something that visitors may not anticipate upon first seeing the old grain bin.

I have seen this working best at the Coutts Centre during events programmed by Josephine Mills, curator of the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery. Mills has worked carefully to create events that will not only bring artists and scholars together but that will do so in a way that is welcoming

to broad audiences, including visitors to the centre. An example is the 2016 Prairie Sun Festival, which saw the first opening of the then in-process camera obscura. Such curatorial impulses extend the realms of artistic creation outside the confines of the art gallery in a way that is paralleled and contextualized by looking to arts festivals organized by art galleries, particularly those staged in small places.

Ice Follies: Celebrating the Peripheral

Ice Follies was imagined by Dermot Wilson, curator of the W. K. P. Kennedy Art Gallery, and first realized in 2004. Ice Follies is rooted in the landscape and culture of North Bay, two hundred miles north of Toronto. As Wilson relates, the Follies "began simply about the place, a white-on-white canvas," and he observes that "small places have space" (Wilson, interview with author, 7 July 2021). With the vast expanse of frozen Lake Nipissing in mind, Dermot's observation is an interesting one, something of an inversion of the principles embedded in the source of his metaphor, Kazimir Malevich's 1918 *Suprematist Composition: White on White*. Whereas Malevich's small canvas, arguably a key instance in the development of abstract painting, invokes a purity and distance from the concerns of daily life, Wilson turned exactly to daily life, looking to what he characterizes as "the architecture of ice fishing huts" (Wilson, interview), at the daily pursuits and subcultures of North Bay. He understood that such an approach to community-based arts events goes against the grain of mainstream art practices:

> At the time, the Canada Council[11] saw Ice Follies as anomalous. There weren't so many projects going out into nature; setting up projects in nature made sense—in the place and in the culture of the place. So, the Council considered that Ice Follies would match the culture and that the W. K. P. Kennedy Art Gallery could actually do this. (Wilson, interview)

There are three dimensions to what Wilson recounts of the Canada Council's support of Ice Follies that are important to the success of such arts events and to their contribution to small-place tourism. First, the cultural activity must be true to the place: smaller communities will have a closer-knit identity and local traditions. Second, the Canada Council seeks to fund projects that, even if unusual, are likely to succeed; it recognized that the W. K. P.

Figure 8.5: Donald Lawrence, "One Eye Folly" (in tow on Lake Nipissing), camera obscura, Ice Follies, North Bay, Ontario, 2008. Source: Peter Nickle.

Figure 8.6: Christine Charette and Jeremy Bean, "Rewind in Fast Forward," installation (on Lake Nipissing), Ice Follies, North Bay, Ontario, 2008. Source: Author.

Figures 8.7a and 8.7b: Peter Nickle, "Ice Cracks," installation (on Lake Nipissing), Ice Follies, North Bay, Ontario, 2008. Source: Author.

Kennedy Gallery, its community members and partners, are woven throughout the broader landscape and subcultures of North Bay, where everyone knows everyone (or at least someone), which creates a network that can enable projects to happen. Third, if there is an expectation of appealing to and engaging a broader audience, things must not stay too insular, and Wilson understood that, even if hosted in a small place, there was a "need to be able to show that this was a national exhibition" (Wilson, interview). How can such an annual event unfold in North Bay, and yet become tangible for the artists, the community, and to visitors? While the proportion of participating artists from the North Bay region versus those from elsewhere across the country varies from year to year, there is always a balance of the two. This serves to keep the Follies rooted in the community, while at the same time enjoying a national profile and significance. As an artist coming from British Columbia, the following is what I experienced and observed.

In the immediate lead-up to the opening day, I worked in a temporary warehouse studio setting alongside a few of the other artists, variously creating their projects or, as in my case, assembling the pieces of the sculptural follies that we had created, partially disassembled, and shipped to North Bay. A few of the other artists were out on the ice constructing their projects on-site, two of them involving the casting/freezing of ice or, like the activity of ice fishing, drilling through the ice to the lake below. The last thing I did in the studio was to construct a simple sled to get my "One Eye Folly" onto the ice. Through the day before the opening, local resident and outfitter Baden Brownlee employed his 1950s Bombardier snow bus to pull several of the structures onto the ice—an informal parade of sorts and itself a community event that signals the lead-up to the Follies each year. After spending the day on the ice finishing up the installation of my project and visiting the other artists as they did the same, I camped out, sleeping on the ice and listening to the booming sound as it cracked through the night. From that experience I came to understand something of the sounds and characteristics of that landscape, sounds that Peter Nickle planned to capture, recompose, and broadcast from "Ice Cracks," the mobile sound lab that he had created, with its customized microphones embedded in the ice. Then in the morning, the visitors to the festival arrived, walking out onto the ice and speaking with the artists or taking in the fun of the snow bus as Baden toured visitors around the projects all day long. In the evening there was a large gathering and dinner attended by the artists, a mix of community members, and particularly

Figure 8.8: Donald Lawrence, "One Eye Folly," camera obscura (on Lake Nipissing), Ice Follies, North Bay, Ontario, 2008.

Source: Author.

engaged festival visitors. The evening was semi-structured, an opportunity for Wilson and the artists to speak to their projects, but also an opportunity for informal gathering and celebration. It was an eclectic group that gathered that evening in North Bay, reminding me at the time of what I had seen a few years previously, in 2004, in another relatively small place, Dawson City, and that I kept in mind a few years later when planning the 2015 Midnight Sun Camera Obscura Festival.

I am used to art gallery openings in which a couple of hundred people gather, as well as ones where just a small number of people gather. I was not expecting what I saw at Ice Follies. At the end of the day I expressed to Dermot Wilson how surprised I was that perhaps 150 to 200 people showed up at the "One Eye Folly," a half-mile off shore. In reply, Wilson said that the day's overall turnout had reached 750, and from the discussions that I had throughout the day, I knew that at least a modest number of visitors travelled to North Bay for the event.

This speaks to both the opportunity and the challenge of small-place art festivals such as this. It is clearly evident from my experience at Ice Follies, Art Marathon, and the Midnight Sun Camera Obscura Festival that those from away—tourists—can become highly engaged by such off-site projects, including some visitors who come upon the events unexpectedly. These visitors became fully engaged in dimensions of the local landscape and community in a manner that is different from what is offered by mainstream tourism. On the other hand, despite finding visitors who come upon such projects unexpectedly, it is true that the most potentially responsive and engaged of those who take in such events are themselves already dedicated members of the arts community. This is not a bad thing. Every cultural activity has its core followers, and it is important to note that they themselves effectively become "tourists" as they travel from place to place to participate in exhibitions, music events, or theatre festivals, etc., with small places often the location of some of the favoured venues. Observing that there is an insular dimension to the audience for such events is, especially in the context of the present volume, a call to those working in and studying tourism to look more closely, and more regularly, at these sorts of events and to consider the increased role that they may play in (small) place promotion.

Art Marathon: Micro-Adventure, Micro-Festival

One of Canada's longer-running artist-run centres, Eastern Edge Gallery sits near the harbour, the kind of place that a small number of tourists will seek out and that others may come upon as they wander around the older part of St. John's, Newfoundland. In 1999 the staff and community of artists supporting Eastern Edge opened the gallery's first twenty-four-hour Art Marathon event, effectively enacting an art-world version and precursor to Alastair Humphreys's micro-adventures, with artists gathering to create and exhibit artworks through the day and night. I was invited to participate in the by then long-running event in 2014, which had by this time been reinvented as a "Spectacular 5 day Extravaganza of Art Music and Performance" (Eastern Edge Gallery 2014).

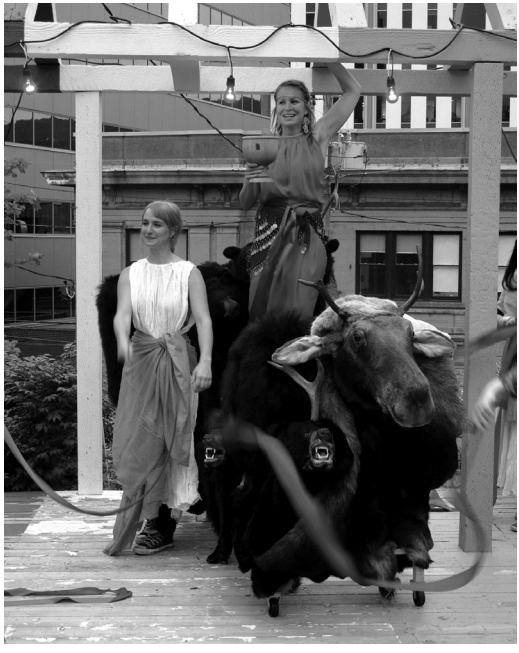
Those attending Art Marathon in 2014 could take in, and in many respects could participate in, several kinds of activities. The gallery hosted an opening reception at which each of the invited artists gave mini-talks about their projects, and from there visitors could follow a printed map to find their way to artists' off-site and pop-up projects. Some of the projects ran through

the night, including illuminated Morse code signals coming from the windows of Signal Hill's Cabot Tower as part of Halifax-based artist Michael McCormack's "Beacon," and Baltimore-based artist Rachael Shannon's inflatable "Breastival Vestibule," which became a welcoming and communal space for discussion and relaxation through the duration of the festival. Eastern Edge was a hub of activity, with artists creating components of off-site projects inside, while outside festival goers could take in Sara Tilley's "Wiener Temple," in which performances were enacted throughout the festival inside the playful, circus-like temple constructed of cardboard and fabrics by Tilley, Kyle Bustin, and Elling Lien. The ground floor of an adjacent parkade was used by local artists for the Art Marathon proper that represents the origins of this event: a twenty-four-hour period in which participating artists created artworks that were then put up for auction. Charmaine Wheatley's artists' parade wound its way through the streets, culminating in a performance composed of local artists, volunteers, and—memorably—at least one enthusiastic visitor.

For me, Art Marathon provided the opportunity to create the floating "Quidi Vidi Camera Obscura" that participants would enter into and paddle through in sea kayaks to take in a projected image of Quidi Vidi Gut, the small harbour and village a mile or so from downtown, a popular spot for tourists in St. John's. The opportunity to imagine and realize this project combined the heightened sensory experience of entering a camera obscura[22] with the basic ingredients of a micro-adventure for participants. Through the one-day event, a crew of volunteers assisted a steady stream of people suiting up and getting into kayaks while I and a local kayaker ensured their safe return from their camera obscura adventure. Locating the experience of a sea kayak mini-adventure to the floating artwork of the Quidi Vidi Harbour was a means of enacting a small-tourism experience for viewers in a way that drew upon and extended my experience of participating in Ice Follies, and it coincided with my planning toward Dawson City's Midnight Sun Camera Obscura Festival for the next year, as discussed below.

An added dimension to such projects as these is the opportunity to be welcomed into the small cultural communities that congregate around places like Eastern Edge. My experience in the projects I document here is that visitors from outside the host communities—tourists—have the unique opportunity to become fully immersed in the experience and fully engaged in small tourism in a small place. One example stands out. Bradley Peters,

Figures 8.9a and 8.9b: Sara Tilley, Kyle Bustin, Elling Lien, "Wiener Sugar Dance Magic," construction by Kyle Bustin, performance by Sara Tilley and Kira Sheppard, Art Marathon, St. John's, Newfoundland, 2014. Source: Author.



Figures 8.10a and 8.10b: Charmaine Wheatley, "What Is the Role of Women?," performance, sculpture, dance, painting, writing, printed matter, Art Marathon, St. John's, Newfoundland, 2014.

Source: Author.

Figure 8.11: Rachael Shannon, "Breastival Vestibule," inflatable installation, Art Marathon, St. John's, Newfoundland, 2014.

Source: Author.

from British Columbia's Lower Mainland, arrived in St. John's the day before I did. As a tourist, he found himself staying in one of the homes along the harbour in the historic Battery area, the same home in which I was billeted. Asking casually about the nature of my project, Peters soon became my most dedicated volunteer helper over the next few days. As a construction worker, Peters gravitated to the pile of two-by-fours that were to be assembled into the camera obscura's framework, all of them to be lashed together with rope, much of which was donated by the fishermen living and working in the stages adjacent to the launch site. Adapting to the method of using rope for my structure rather than the usual methods of his trade, Peters offered the observation that "there don't seem to be any rules." He was referring to my structure but also, I think, to the arts festival as a whole. This of course is not quite true; Peters likely recognized the extent of organizing, planning, and dedication that made Art Marathon a success. Perhaps he really meant

Figure 8.12: Curator Mary MacDonald entering Donald Lawrence's "Quidi Vidi Camera Obscura," Art Marathon, St. John's, Newfoundland, 2014. Source: Author.

Figure 8.13: Traveller Bradley Peters lashing together the framework of the "Quidi Vidi Camera Obscura," Art Marathon, St. John's, Newfoundland, 2014. Source: Author

that his full immersion in the festival community was free from the tropes of traditional tourism. In varying ways and in varying degrees, such events as these welcome and encourage visitors to engage in the experience at hand in different ways, to not stand back as passive observers.

Kai Bryan, one of the festival's key volunteers in 2014, and more recently the executive director of St. John's Storytelling Festival, considers St. John's to be a "medium-small place," the determining factor being scale. Large by comparison to Bryan's outport hometown of Ferryland, St. John's is small in comparison to places such as Toronto. Bringing knowledge of large-city cultural experiences and infrastructure after moving back to Newfoundland from Toronto in 2012, Bryan joins others in recognizing the efforts and successes that Eastern Edge's director/curator at the time, the late Mary McDonald (1985–2017), made toward creating connections to art practices from across the country. Bryan recalls that McDonald succeeded not only in connecting Eastern Edge Gallery to the national community but, at the same time, sought to make the gallery "almost as much like a community living room as an art space" (interview with author, 20 August 2021). There is both significant opportunity and challenge for arts organizations around such ambitions, including where they intersect the interests of tourism. As Bryan relates, McDonald came from a small community herself—Pictou, Nova Scotia—and studied art making in small communities. While such organizations as Eastern Edge Gallery are explicit in seeking to engage a tourist audience—such objectives were built into funding proposals for Art Marathon—the challenge "of running arts festivals in small places" that Bryan identifies is to not misrepresent a region and its cultural traditions, that "there is a knife edge" (Bryan, interview) dividing what may be a meaningful encounter between outside engagement with smaller communities and a too superficial, or even too exploitive, approach to welcoming visitors. Even in Quidi Vidi itself, and though I felt welcomed into the community, it is not difficult to see where such concern can lie, with gentrification increasingly transforming this small enclave, as well as other places in the bays more distant from St. John's.

Midnight Sun Camera Obscura Festival: Big Culture, Small Place

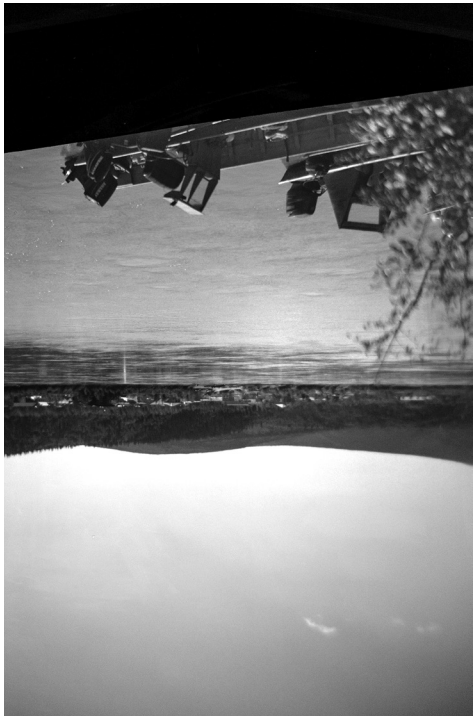
Where I grew up in Victoria, British Columbia, a neighbour's van featured a bumper sticker that boasted, as I recall, "We drove the Alaska Highway.

Yes dammit, the whole way!" The great North American adventure of this particular road trip has been a goal of many tourists since the mid-twentieth century. Though made easier by way of upgrades to the original "Alcan" highway over the decades, the appeal is still there, with Yukon's Dawson City (population 1,400) as a primary destination for tourists. For many, perhaps for most, but with varying degrees of comfort, luxury, or travel time, the appeal of the journey to Dawson City that has lingered since the Klondike gold rush, and its unique culture of place promotion even as early as the 1890s, is still present.

Much of the architecture of Dawson City remains from the gold rush period, with many buildings carefully preserved by Parks Canada. Some buildings, including West's Boiler Shop, are maintained in a way that preserves evidence of their weathering over the years, a sort of perpetual time capsule of the image of the boomtown present at the time that tourists began venturing there on the gravel highway in the 1950s.

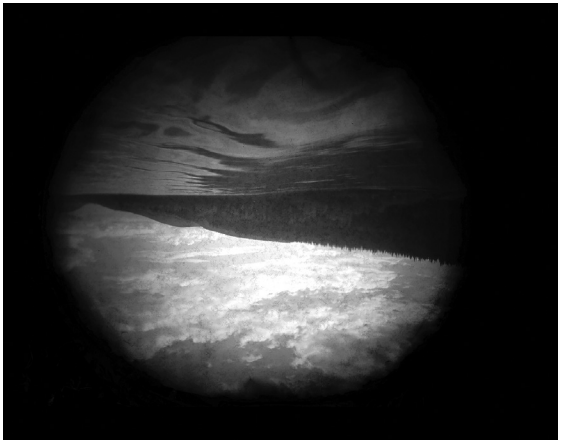
The highway crosses the Yukon River at Dawson City by way of the *George Black* ferry. Beside the ferry landing at West Dawson and around the time of the 2015 summer solstice, Lea Bucknell's "False Front" existed as one of nine off-site projects that were part of the Midnight Sun Camera Obscura Festival. Considered by Bucknell to be a laterally compressed version of West's Boiler Shop, "False Front" referenced the facades of commercial buildings entrenched in frontier town architecture by the 1890s, at the same time as alluding to the jovial gesture of the entire facade of "False Front" swinging open on oversized hinges to let visitors into the shed-like structure. Once inside, the glittering gold-clad exterior gave way to an inverted optical projection filling the back wall of the structure, facilitated by an eyeglass lens set into the oversized front door. This provided viewers not only with a multi-sensory experience akin to simple walk-in cameras obscura of pre-photographic times, but also an image of the real town of Dawson City across the river, effectively unadorned by the imagery of the town's gold rush past that is otherwise an ever-present tourism strategy in Dawson City.

Working with the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture (KIAC), and with funding from the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada, as well as the Canada Council for the Arts, the festival was realized in 2015. Its origins, however, were in 2004, when a few of us imagined the idea following the success of a "48hr Pinhole Photography Workshop" led by Whitehorse-based photographer Mario Villeneuve, that saw KIAC and its darkrooms as



Figures 8.14a and 8.14b: Lea Bucknell, "False Front," (exterior view and interior projection), camera obscura, Midnight Sun Camera Obscura Festival, Dawson City, Yukon, 2015.

Source: Lea Bucknell.



Figures 8.15a, 8.15b, and 8.15c: Donald Lawrence, "George Black Camera Obscura" (overall view, interior projection, canoeists viewing interior projection), camera obscura on *George Black* ferry, Midnight Sun Camera Obscura Festival, Dawson City, Yukon, 2015.

Source: Author.

Figure 8.16: Bo Yeung. "Hold Tight, Keep It Adrift," off-site project for the . . . *strange things done* . . . exhibition, Midnight Sun Camera Obscura Festival, Dawson City, Yukon, 2015.
Source: Author.

a base for participants to create and use simple DIY cameras. In a manner that has obvious affinities with Ice Follies and Art Marathon, this 2004 event included such adventures as a couple of participants driving their van north along the (still gravel) Dempster Highway to the Tombstone Mountains, turning the van into a giant darkened pinhole camera, and then returning to KIAC to process their large-scale exposed photographic paper, however having to repeat that process a time or two in order to achieve a successful image.

Learning from these and the other collective experiences, an international team met in Dawson City in 2014 to plan the next year's events. The team included artists, scholars of optics and science in early modern Europe, researchers on the entertainment culture that emerged through the nineteenth century, an education theorist and wilderness canoeist, curators, several undergraduate research assistants, and recent visual arts alumni. Alongside the off-site projects the festival included a gallery-based exhibition of related

Figure 8.17: S. S. *Klondike* Workshop (participants with drawings and drawing inside temporary camera obscura), with the Yukon Arts Centre, Whitehorse, Yukon, 2015.

Source: Author.

works by the team's artists and . . . *strange things done* . . . , an exhibition in the Yukon School of Visual Arts (SOVA) of projects created by the festival research assistants; a series of artists' talks, lectures, and panel discussions in KIAC's former ballroom; and a series of public workshops. One such workshop, "Pretty Noisy," was initiated by research assistant Eliza Houg with the specific and successful intent of engaging the youth community, which is a key part of the vibrancy of Dawson City in the summer. A student of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University at the time, Houg was herself an alumna of SOVA; working with such locally engaged individuals is crucial to the success of such events in small places, and the scale of Dawson City is right for projects such as this.

Conclusion: Participating in the Community

The social networks that Eliza Houg and her peer group activated through their hosting of the Pretty Noisy workshop in Dawson City is indicative of the level of community networking and engagement that lies behind the success of the activities in Dawson City and the other arts festivals examined here. In their 2021 analysis of the importance of small-scale arts festivals in Portugal, Fiona Eva Bakas and colleagues recognize similar patterns, foregrounding the way in which "local residents (and often the visiting participants themselves) also engage in activities such as volunteering to help in the running of the festival as well as practices of mutual aid in the form of cooperating with artists to create artistic performances" (12). As a participating artist in Ice Follies and during the early planning stages of the Midnight Sun Camera Obscura Festival, the first part of Bakas's observation was familiar to me—the importance of the local community and social networks in the success of small-place arts festivals. What is particularly resonant for me is Bakas's allusion to the potential of "visiting participants," for the way that it recalls the experience during the Art Marathon on Canada's East Coast of seeing Bradley Peters, a hitchhiker arriving by chance that week from the West Coast, becoming a key enabler and participant of my own and other artists' projects through the duration of the festival. Bakas makes the case that

> small-scale local festivals also act as development frameworks for creative tourism activities. The integration of creative tourism activities, which are defined as experiences that include elements of active participation, creative self-expression, connection to place, and community engagement. (12)

The intent of the present contribution is to argue that these attributes are already built into the lived experience of many small-scale arts festivals in small places, that if the value of such an approach is recognized, then the broader context in which such artworks exist, a context that includes such surprising small arts festivals as North Bay's Ice Follies and St. John's Art Marathon (now Holdfast), may also be considered as successful examples of small tourism in small places. This is an opportunity to encourage tourists to engage in current, often experimental, dimensions of contemporary art, to take a chance on participating in an art micro-adventure. The challenge is to move past or through assumptions that such practices are the preserve of

small sub-communities, to not wait until the energy of such events is domesticated through processes of normalization and gentrification. It is perhaps in small but culturally savvy settings that this can happen best, where a visitor may step into a new place one day and potentially be an active part of it the next.

NOTES

1 The Canada Council for the Arts is the primary funding agency for artistic practices in Canada.

2 For further reading on the experiential nature of walk-in cameras obscura, see for example Sven Dupré, "The Camera Obscura on the Move: Body, Animation, Imagination, in *Art, Research, Play: The Midnight Sun Camera Obscura Project*, ed. Donald Lawrence, Josephine Mills, and Emily Dundas-Oke (Lethbridge, AB: University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, 2021), 183–95.

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