

If We Can't Get It Together

THE POWER PLANT, TORONTO

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In the face of internationalization, political volatility and mass migration, identities—and the communities to which they belong—have become more fluid than ever. Looking to artists who explore experimental and imagined social formations, the German critic and curator Nina Möntmann considers the disharmonies and unities that are central to collective organization in the exhibition “If We Can’t Get It Together.”

Central to the show are works that draw attention to the subversive potential of social networks. In *Khirkheeyaan* (2006) Shaina Anand uses cheap surveillance technology to create an open-circuit network and feedback interface between various members of a New Delhi neighbourhood. The resulting seven videos include simultaneous conversations among four different groups: female caretakers who rarely leave their premises alone; salon and grocery store patrons and owners; teenagers and kids; and sweatshop workers. Their interactions range from supportive and humorous to hostile and disturbing, revealing tensions of caste, class, gender and local geopolitics. Kajsa Dahlberg’s video *You Must Not Do That/You Must Do That* (2008) records the dismantling of a Danish separatist women’s camp, and is accompanied by an etched-glass version of a signed contract between the women of the camp and the artist. The video and contract illustrate the mobilization of gender-based collective agency outside of existing political frameworks.

Among a number of works that emphasize activism are several pieces that reframe collective activities through the fictional. Egle Budvytyte’s video work is a faux documentary that describes a utopian society named Secta, whose members are “always on time”

and have adopted bizarre public rituals such as walking backwards up escalators. Haegue Yang's piece *Domestics of Community—Version Toronto* (2008) simulates the lights, sounds, scents and wind of the city using venetian blinds, a freezer, a fan, heaters and scent emitters in order to allegorize the social production of public and private space. By overtly manufacturing the ordinary, these pieces bring to light the absurdity of the everyday codes that have come to define community living.

The exhibition also includes a number of Canadian artists whose works engage with the unrealized ideals of collective action. *Gloomy Sunday* (2006), by the Berlin-based duo Hadley + Maxwell, is a video reconstruction of a photograph of a student slain during the protests at Kent State University in 1970. In reconsidering the ghosts of Kent State, the artists remind viewers of the broken dreams of mass mobilization. In a more self-reflexive vein, Luis Jacob presents *Shining* (2008), a sculpture of a solitary swan that raises the question of the difficulties of individual recognition in the context of the shared language of artistic collaboration.

The show emphasizes the urgent need to revise definitions of community in order to recognize new forms of public activism. By bringing together a range of international artists whose works consider collectivity, this show reveals the possibilities and potential shortcomings of social agency, reminding us what it really means to get it together.

<http://www.canadianart.ca/art/reviews/2009/03/01/if-we-cant/>