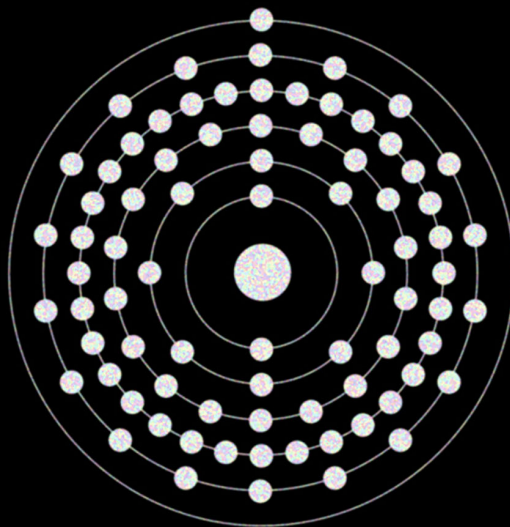




BLOG ARCHIVES 2010 - 2018, EDITION 2018, TEXTS AND INTERVIEWS 2018

INTERVIEW WITH DEBORAH STRATMAN



*Optimism* combines media and formats but it is mainly shot in Super 8 and these granular images sometimes reveal a circular shape, why did you choose this medium and how did you work it?

I chose the Super 8 because the mechanical gear was more reliable than the digital at a temperature of -47 °C. I sewed a small jacket for the camera which I stuffed with packages of hand warmers! I loved using this "point and shoot" technology (editor's note: "aim and film" but also "aim and shoot"). It was like using a toy, light and portable. Easy to manipulate. Very liberating. I like to shoot my films with different technologies. Each tool changes the framing and vision habits. The how infuses the what.

Then there are a lot of circles in the film. The concentric one you are referring to is the signature of the ring of molecular electrons for gold. The transition from film grain to video snow is a kind of "pun" that applies to all the other types of snow in the film. Most importantly, I wanted the shift from analog to digital to echo the concept of transmutation - the alchemical desire to convert the ordinary to the precious. The electron ring could alternatively be read as a mandala or a charm. This form evokes a kind of secret code whose intensity I like, because it seems to me that the "value" and the way in which it is assigned to certain things, is essentially elusive. The form, therefore, harbors a secret.

There are two types of narration - sounds and images - which overlap without ever meeting. Did you create the two simultaneously, or did you start by writing one and then the other?

I wanted the sound to kind of leap forward. This is why certain sounds, which correspond to certain places, appear long before they appear in the image, or vice versa - as in an erratic series of premonitions and choruses. I like the errors of interpretation which occur when a sound makes a tandem with an image with which it is not synchronous. The images were filmed a few years ago. I reworked them a bit like it was *found-footage*. I was not sure if there was a film to make from these images until I replay the audio recordings. I then understood that Simon's monologue, the gold smelter, on the subject of land claims, as well as the rap of John and Eldo on the heliostat could initiate a portrait that would be somewhere between greed and hope.



What is the 'origin' of plant in Dawson City who reflected the sun on the city park?

The installation is not the heliostat. The disc you see on the hill is part of a series of sculptures called *Augural Pair* that the city of Dawson City commissioned from my college Steve Badgett and I as part of the "**Natural and Manufactured**" series from the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture (KIAC). There is a disturbing coincidence in the fact that our sculpture on the hill corresponds to this point with the heliostat that John Steins and Eldo Enns describe at the beginning of the film, when it was never built. With *Augural Pair* we wanted to make an apparent hole in the side of the cliff in response to the intense mining activity there. We used mirrors to reflect the sky. It seems white in my film because of the level of exposure I chose. Locals say it looks like an eye following them up the hill.

The town is new to the 'gold' and this heritage is still to be felt. Gradually, the viewer also realizes that 'it's' is also of 'an Indigenous territory'. It is difficult to understand the tensions between the populations in the film. What impression did you get there?

Dawson reinvented himself when gold was discovered in 1896 which led to the Klondike rush. The city swelled until all concessions were awarded. All the torrents and surrounding rivers have been completely transformed by hydraulic operations and dredging. When you fly over them, you can see how the streams have been transformed into a kind of intestinal tracks that thread their way between the heaps of gravel. Of course, there was a community before the rush, with a very different relationship to territory and property. For thousands of years, the city has welcomed the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and other Hän-speaking populations at the confluence of the Yukon and the Klondike. Not surprisingly, they are quite concerned about the way Canadians, Americans and Europeans manage the territory. The economy of the city is now oriented towards tourism - hence the casino in period costume. The population continues to evolve according to the price of gold. When it was close to \$2,000 an ounce in 2011, planes poured in filled with geologists and prospectors. There is also a small intrepid community living here year round. Many people live outside the city, along the river. When the river is only half frozen - when the ferry can no longer pass and the water is not yet frozen enough to open a route - they live on their side of the river, trying to enjoy this forced vacation. It is a place that attracts people who like to live on the margins. The population continues to

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