

## Work in Practice

By Farhad Manouchehri for [urbanemagazine.org](http://urbanemagazine.org)

To the naked eye, it was just an office space; one setup with cubicles comprised of desks, filing cabinets, plants, stationary, and printers -a conventional work area, except that it was not. When I got my admissions ticket to the **Art Gallery of Ontario** along with the pithy 'Members Matter' sticker, I received from the receptionist an additional welcome treat: a square-shaped piece of paper resembling a sticky-note. On it was an explanation regarding an event named '**9 to 5: Canadian Artists at Work,**' featuring artists **Anitra Hamilton**, Graeme Patterson, and Ed Pien. The exhibition, ironically, encouraged an intimate interaction with the artists; whether they were occupied with their projects or just standing by and casually greeting you. Perhaps it was due to the sidesplitting juxtaposition of an office and a gallery space.



I had the opportunity to sit down with, and interview each of the artists. The conversations with all three were, in their own way, remarkably engaging.

When I asked **Anitra Hamilton** about her motivation behind participating in the exhibition, she responded: "They invited me and I thought it is a good opportunity to show that artists actually have administrative work." **Hamilton** spent most of her time managing her tax return forms; it seemed a very natural thing to do since the deadline was only days away. "The venue had a potential of addressing the false presumptions on part of the public; like people could come up and say well you're an artist shouldn't you actually be doing art?" **Hamilton** said tittering. **Hamilton** stated that she wasn't going to stage an artistic project; her presence at the CAW at the AGO was very natural, she was attending to activities that she would have otherwise been completing.

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Patterson and Pien were, however, occupied with more artistically inclined work. Patterson shared that he had participated in a similar event previously. "I find this idea of residency very interesting. By presenting the viewers with the actual object and its progress, they can get a better grasp of the process that goes into my work," said Patterson. Pien's motivation behind participating in this event went one step further than Patterson's. "I feel that the work is incomplete until I have received some form of response from the audience. So when they told me to come and actively engage with the gallery viewers I was thrilled, because that is part of my work!" Pien said stirringly.



In addition to completing her tax chore, **Hamilton** was researching for her upcoming project; "I am hoping to go to China in October to record the National Day Parade" she explained whilst presenting me with a book called Folk Costumes of World by Robert Harrold and Phyllida Legg. **Hamilton's** work is often invested in themes of "folklore and militarism." (1) Her upcoming project is a sort of projection from her previous work that dealt with the premise of war, as the soldiers in the National Day Parade of China have to act very robotic and maneuver in a calculated fashion. Patterson, on the other hand explained that he was in the middle of a project for 2012-2013, and was working on the project in the Canadian Artists at Work venue seemed like a good idea as he values feedback from his audience. "People's reactions were mostly positive, and so when I would tell them that I made these puppets there was some interest there, and then I would show the projection of my work; But it was interesting to see that for the people who were familiar with my work, only a small glimpse of the objects would be enough of a visual cue to understand my work". Furthermore, Patterson said: "a long process goes into my work, and so I find that often it is better for people to see that process in order to understand my work better."

The artists also gave their take on the Canadian art scene. "There is a real problem with that! We need to be promoting our artists more and get them out of the country." said **Hamilton** when I asked her what role large institutions such as the AGO could play in order to sponsor and foster local and Canadian art. She went on to say that the Canada Council for the Arts should issue more grants to the travelling artists and fund international programs to encourage the dialogue within the global art scene. **Hamilton** outlined that international ties prompts constructive connections that might also result in participation of foreign artists in Canadian art venues. In agreement to

**Hamilton**, Pien stated: "Yes we need to raise awareness about the community art! A lot of artists leave the country to gain a new and fresh exposure to the international art scene." As a possible solution to this matter Pien explained that in almost all the countries that he has been to, large institutions, such as the AGO, showcase their local artist alongside the international artist exhibitions. Finally Pien explained: "A lot of it also depends on how much these institutions are willing to invest time and money into it. I don't know how much time was spent for organizing this event, but I would say that it was very successful; I mean people would walk into the gallery with their hands already extended to greet me and have a discussion."

The conclusion of the three-day long venue was marked by a symposium and a closing reception. The keynote address was by curator, artist, and educator Rebecca Duclos. A very eloquent speaker, Duclos' presentation dealt with the fine line between artist as a performer and as a performance him/herself. Moreover, she outlined "the burgeoning topic of artists' research." (2) The closing reception was held at the Studio Condominiums presentation center, a very chic and modern setting set perfect for celebrating the end of a three-day long hard 'work.' By then I had established an honorable friendship with the three artists, and also the organizers of the event: Katherine Dennis, Mary MacDonald and Zach Pearl.

(1) [http://apache.ocad.ca/events\\_calendar/eventdetail.php?id=3281](http://apache.ocad.ca/events_calendar/eventdetail.php?id=3281)

(2) [http://apache.ocad.ca/events\\_calendar/eventdetail.php?id=328](http://apache.ocad.ca/events_calendar/eventdetail.php?id=328)