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## Don Blanche House of yes

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BY GABRIELLE MOSER  
PHOTO CHRISTOPHER DEW

# DON BLANCHE HOUSE OF YES

**SHELBURNE, ON** No proposals. No resumes. No deadlines. Much like the small, independent farm on which it's hosted, the Don Blanche residency is an anomaly in an increasingly globalized world. Created in 2009 by Don Miller and Christine Swintak as "a gift to artists," Don Blanche is a ten-day residency that takes place each summer near Shelburne, Ontario, a small town two hours north of Toronto.

Centred in and around a huge 6,000-square-foot building that Miller constructed from century-old dismantled barns and an array of purposefully placed found window panes (Swintak has affectionately nicknamed it the "Frankenbarn"), Don Blanche hosts up to 80 artists who come from across the country to work on projects. There is no running water, and limited electricity comes from solar panels and wind turbines. Most participants camp outside or sleep in a dorm in a wing of the barn.

It may sound like a modern-day version of Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*, but Don Blanche's rough-and-ready approach attracts an impressive roster of contemporary artists and curators; Diane Borsato, EASTWÜRMS, Michelle Jacques, Olia Mishchenko, Ben Portis, Geoffrey Pugen and Nicholas Pye are among its participants.

Miller and Swintak first met in 1999 at the Nova Scotia College

of Art and Design. Both artists, their way of alleviating the pressures of international residencies was to reverse the trend of the cushy "professional" residency by challenging artists to manage their most basic needs and seeing what kinds of creative solutions and artistic strategies would result. "Building basic amenities becomes part of the creative project," Miller explains.

Though it recalls the artistic hangouts of the 1960s and 1970s—such as the Maplewood Mudflats squats in North Vancouver, or Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov's Babyland retreat at Robert's Creek, BC—Don Blanche is less an idealistic hippie haven than an open-air artist-run centre. In an "office" space that Swintak has carved out inside the Frankenbarn, three large blackboards keep the residency organized, charting arrivals and departures, a list of programs and projects started on the property, and participants' material and equipment requests. Funding for materials comes largely from an Ontario Arts Council grant and is given out on a first-come, first-served basis from two tin boxes on Swintak's desk. On Labour Day weekend, Miller and Swintak present a public open house that marks the end of the residency. In a pithy turn of phrase that could easily work as Don Blanche's motto, Swintak says, "Our curatorial premise is 'yes.'"

# THIS ISSUE

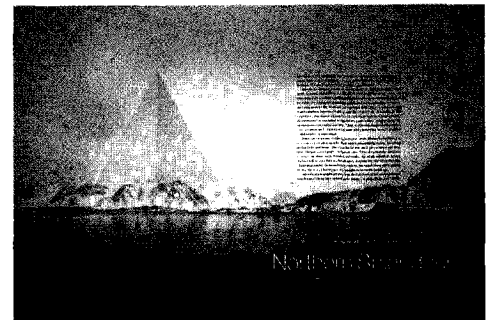


RICHARD RHODES, Editor

In a 2011 summer that has brought days of 30-degree temperatures to Toronto, production of a fall issue themed “Ideas of North” offers its own respite from the heat of a parched urban landscape. Our thoughts are with Sarah Anne Johnson’s paint-assisted photoworks from above the Arctic Circle, and with Timothy Taylor and Donald Weber, whose text and photo series introduce us to the filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk and his Inuit community in Igloolik. Aboard the schooner *Noorderlicht*, we get to meet the artists and writers who have taken part in the Cape Farewell expeditions, where creative imaginations come face-to-face with the changing environment. These feature stories bring home the fact that in the 100 years since Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven ventured to Georgian Bay, Algonquin Park and Algoma, the North has moved on as an idea and as a reality. It is now a front line, one that shifts in relation to climate change and access to global media technologies. The North is near—in ways that it has never been before—and the stories in the issue frame its connection with contemporary art. In Murray Whyte’s profile of the Calgary artist Terrance Houle, we see how an art is shaped by the overlap between Indigenous history and the cosmopolitan cities that have steadily sprung up across North America. Off the coast of Newfoundland, the novelist Lisa Moore visits Fogo Island and the remarkable Fogo

Island Arts Corporation, a group launching an international artist-residency program that aims to incubate new art and forge a new economic future from the ruins of the region’s disappeared fishery industry. And as a kick-start to these features, the writer Sara Angel helps us to remember a key moment in contemporary Canadian art—the 1971 opening of Joyce Wieland’s “True Patriot Love” exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada, when the gallery occupied an ungainly (but effective) office building on Ottawa’s Elgin Street. The show marked the advent of feminism in Canadian art and also a new confident, nationalist sentiment that expressed both a pride and a mythology of place. With the show, Wieland made a definitive return from New York—a return North. On a personal note, mention needs to be made that this is Melony Ward’s last issue as publisher. As she moves on to other ventures, she deserves sincere thanks for the outstanding work she has done over the past 11 years in raising the profile of the magazine and its growing online counterpart.

Turn to page 118 to read Nancy Tousley’s take on Sarah Anne Johnson’s *Arctic Wonderland*



## Contributors



KAPUSTA

TAYLOR

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**BETH KAPUSTA** is a Toronto-based writer and architecture critic. She has written more than 100 newspaper and magazine articles and has been involved in numerous projects and competitions that reflect her passion for the urban and cultural landscape of her hometown, Toronto. A participant on the 2010 Cape Farewell expedition, Beth is also a founding board member of Cape Farewell Foundation, Cape Farewell’s North American sister organization.

**TIMOTHY TAYLOR** is an award-winning journalist and author. He writes for newspapers and magazines in Canada and the United States and is a contributing editor at *EnRoute*, *Vancouver Magazine* and *Eighteen Bridges*. Taylor is the author of four books; his most recent is the bestselling novel *The Blue Light Project*.

**LISA MOORE** lives in St. John’s, Newfoundland, and teaches creative writing online at the University of British Columbia. She is the author of two short-story collections (*Open* and *Degrees of Nakedness*) and two novels (*Alligator* and *February*). *February* was longlisted for the 2010 Man Booker Prize and will be translated into French, German, Italian, Dutch and Spanish. She is hard at work on another novel.

**MURRAY WHYTE** is a well-known arts journalist who has been the art critic for the *Toronto Star* since 2008. He’s written about art for the *New York Times*, *ARTnews*, the *National Post* and *Canadian Art*, among many others. A westerner transplanted by circumstance and necessity to the east, he keeps saying he’ll get back there. In the meantime he’ll connect via art, as he does in this issue with his portrait of the Calgary-based artist Terrance Houle.

**GABRIELLE MOSER** is a writer, curator and educator based in Toronto. Her writing has appeared in various publications, including *ARTnews*, *C magazine*, *Fillip*, *n paradoxa* and *Photography & Culture*, and she has curated screenings and exhibitions for Vtape, the Leona Drive Project and Gallery TPW. Moser is currently pursuing a PhD in the Art History and Visual Culture program at York University and working on an exhibition for Vancouver’s Access Gallery.