

Henry Tsang is a visual and media artist and occasional curator whose work incorporates digital media, video, photography, language, and sculptural elements in the exploration of the relationship between the public, community, and identity in the new global order. Projects in the public sphere range from community-based curatorial and engagement practices to permanent commissioned artworks. Video installations such as *Orange County* (2004) and *Olympus* (2006) shot in California, Beijing, Torino, and Vancouver examine overlapping urban and socio-political spaces. *Napa North* (2008) looks at the relationship between wine, real estate, and cultural translation in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley. His *Welcome to the Land of Light* is a 100 metre-long installation located on the seawall handrail along Vancouver's False Creek. Comprised of fibre optic cable lighting and marine-grade aluminum lettering, it literally underscores Chinook Jargon, a nineteenth century local trade language, and the English that replaced it, to speak about the promise of technology and how different cultures have come to live together in that part of the world. Henry received the VIVA Award in 1993 and is an Associate Professor at Emily Carr University of Art & Design in Vancouver.

Glen Lowry is Vancouver-based writer, educator, and editor, who teaches Critical and Cultural Studies at Emily Carr Institute for Art + Design. Glen edits *West Coast Line* and is also a founding editor of LINEbooks: Burnaby, a micropress specializing experimental poetry and poetics. With Henry Tsang and M. Simon Levin, Glen is collaborating on the Maraya project, an art-/media-based initiative attempting to connect urban waterfront developments in Vancouver, Canada, and Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Napa North

[Napa North consists of a series of colour photographs, a 3-Channel video installation, and wine tastings at a custom-designed wine tasting bar, complemented by native Okanagan language and cultural workshops at the Kelowna Art Gallery, Alternator Gallery, and Penticton Art Gallery. Over the course of a year and a half, Henry Tsang worked with local farmers, winemakers, land developers and cultural communities in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley to explore their hopes and concerns. Once known as the province's agricultural breadbasket, this region has experienced rapid urban development while rebranding itself as a site for luxury lifestyle living. Central to the project is Osoyoos Indian Band elder Modesta Betterton, whose stories about her community's history and economic development is interwoven with active translations of language employed by the local wine, real estate and tourism industries.]

Terroir / as in Translation¹

Ic ma'y stm ank^w ulmāntət t'l'a sapi t_āpna? kal skəcəctət kal sən̄siȳtk^wtn. łac k^wulstm I_śtmʔalt łac naix^wisum i? təmtmutn. n?aip ic k^wulstm I_cic.²

A focal point of Henry Tsang's *Napa North* is a video of Modesta Stelkia Betterton, Osoyoos Indian Band (OIB) elder and N'syilxcen (Okanagan) language teacher. Moving between N'syilxcen translations of statements prepared by Tsang from local promotional materials and conversations with the artist (in English) about OIB involvement in contemporary viticulture, Betterton reflects on the transformation of British Columbia's Okanagan valley into a destination for wine tourism and luxury living, her impromptu narrative framing the rapid emergence of Napa North. Recalling an initial partnership with Andres Wines and the band's subsequent decision to develop Nk'Mip Cellars, Betterton tells us, "The grapes [were] started because we wanted our people to come to work here at home instead of going to the States." Betterton's story strikes a balance between the ambitious scope of regional development and basic needs. Her anecdotes place the proliferating luxury real-estate developments on a decidedly human scale. In a context that includes The Rise (near Vernon) and Greata Ranch (between Kelowna and Penticton), a partnership between Cedar Creek Winery and real-estate developer Concord Pacific, the OIB Development Corporation's \$25 million real-estate development project—which includes two restaurants, luxury spa and conference



Napa North (The Rise), 2008
colour photograph

facilities, a year-round campground and RV park, nine-hole golf course, and cultural centre—is a fascinating foil with which to view the effects of neoliberal government policy on a relatively small group of people. The collective success of the 370-member OIB is an example of the intricate, contradictory histories at play in the regeneration of regional economies, and of the translation—re-packaging and branding—of these histories for global consumption.

Historically, the concept of terroir is linked with a system for classifying the production and distributions of comestibles—coffee, tea, and wine; perhaps the best known example of which is France's *Appellation d'origine contrôlée* (AOC). Recently, however, terroir has undergone a process of translation. Appropriated by copywriters to sell New World wines and by wine aficionados to categorize (or brand) differences among varietals, terroir has come to be used to generalize geo-climatic traits in order to position emerging producers among global leaders. Thus, the notion of terroir explored through the various facets of *Napa North* hinges on the play between historical references and looser abstract or metaphorical meanings.

Staging a dialogue between local wine production and advanced capitalism, historical specificity and the homogenizing drives of global taste, *Napa North* draws on the potent symbolism that surrounds wine—its association with land ownership, trade, consumption, and culture; its role in developing material practices and spiritual beliefs, as well as in defining social values of refinement and decadence. Characteristic of Tsang's commitment to cross-cultural collaboration, this work continues an installation and public art practice spanning two decades of negotiation with racialized subjectivity in Canada. Tsang's engagement with the Osoyoos people and their transformation of one of Canada's largest remaining tracts of desert land raises crucial questions about the fluidity of wealth, the politics of entitlement, and the limits of enfranchisement that continue to trouble nationalist discourses.

Something of the work's humour and sly intentions are available in Tsang's reworking of Edouard Manet's *Bar at the Folies Bergères* (1882). Tsang's photographic take on this touchstone of Western art history is suggestive of a critical engagement with the history of European modernism and its particular re-configuration of the artist figure. In Tsang's version, unlike Manet's, the female subject smiles back, returning our gaze and defying the solemnity of the canonical work. An image of celebration, she flouts critical commentary—*remind me again who is being left out of the party*—and common sense—*this real-estate boom can last forever*.

This photograph and the Betterton video are but elements of *Napa North's* variegated form, which includes videotaped interviews and scenic footage,



Video Stills with Modesta Stelkia Betterton and Lane Stelkia, from *Napa North*, 2008
3-Channel Video Installation, 30 minutes



Napa North (The Rise), 2008
colour photograph



Napa North (Spirit Ridge), 2008
colour photograph

photographs of regional landscapes, production facilities, and real-estate developments, food and wine tastings (presented in conjunction with the project's Napa North Wine Club, napanorth.org), public talks, and cultural workshops (supported by the OIB's Desert Cultural Centre). The events, rather than being addenda to the main body of work in the galleries, are integral to Tsang's relational art practice. The expansive nature of Napa North remains grounded in the complex ethical engagements proposed through the work.

Returning to the fertile terrain of his earlier artworks, Tsang continues to work themes of linguistic specificity, geographic mobility, cultural memory, and translation. *Napa North* is reminiscent of Tsang's work with Chinook Jargon, most notably *Welcome to the Land of Light* (1997), a public art installation based on translations of real-estate propaganda and subsequent banner series for the World Urban Forum (2006). It also conjures up the artist's engagement with bifurcating 21st century geographies—e.g., *Orange County* (2004), which looks at Orange County, California, and Orange County, Beijing, and *Olympus* (2005), shot on sites for the Torino 2006 and Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics. These works remind us that, increasingly, “[w]e are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” and that “our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its *own* skein.”³

In the spirit of this unfolding network, *Napa North* invites us to look at a world in which market forces and land reserves intersect to produce barely imaginable futures, utopian dreams of shared prosperity and luxury. Engaging with the work of the Osoyoos people and their negotiations with advanced capitalism, seeking the exception rather than the norm, Tsang's work provides space for reflection on our respective participation in a process of urbanization that is re-engineering country and city alike. As we gather, sampling the seasonal blends of disparate investments and labours, tasting the fruits of this year's socio-economic climate, we might do well to think ahead to the next millennium and to ask which or whose terroir is most likely to produce the best returns next year, or the season after that.

Notes

- 1 This is a reprint from: Lowry, Glen (2008). *Terroir / as in Translation*. In *Edges of Diversity* [catalogue]. Kelowna, BC: Alternator Gallery for Contemporary Art.
- 2 N'syilxcen translation of the following: “We share our history and traditions with those who visit the winery. From the early years of ranching, trading and small farms, we have continued to change with the times.”
- 3 Michel Foucault. *Of Other Spaces* (1967), *Heterotopias*. Retrieved 9 February 2011 from: <http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>



Napa North (Summerhill Winery Tasting Room), 2008
colour photograph



Napa North (Spirit Ridge), 2008
colour photograph