

# MARAYA: SISYPHEAN CART

Brian McBay

221A

The project is presented at 221A's exhibition room located in Chinatown, Vancouver, where it is undergoing intensive neighbourhood gentrification and experiencing crude orientalist marketing campaigns that add to the ongoing crisis of affordability and cultural homogenization.

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M. Simon Levin,  
Henry Tsang, Glen Lowry

## MARAYA: SISYPHEAN CART

*Performance, exhibition (2015)*

*Maraya: Sisyphian Cart* is a mobile 'sousveillance' cart that conducts a site-specific participatory spatial investigation of Vancouver's False Creek and the Dubai Marina. It premiered at the 20th International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA) in Dubai in November 2014, and completes its second leg for ISEA 2015 in Vancouver. This custom-designed hand-drawn cart is mounted with an automated pan-tilt-zoom (PTZ) camera and pulled along the both waterfront seawall paths. Imagery produced by the skyscraper-facing camera will provide alternative perspectives on this built environment, from vantage points that intentionally torque a conventional street-view perspective. Through a custom designed program, the PTZ camera searches for connections, similarities and anomalies, generatively remixing its HD video capture with imagery from its doppelganger. Archetypal architectural forms surround the camera, reflecting the master-

planned urban landscape that in turn reflects the design and desire of lifestyle and capital that is so fluid and mobile in today's globalized economies. The cart itself, and significantly the pulling of it, invokes the spectre of labour – purposeful walking as a form of resistance to readily consumed images of idealized leisure – and the Sisyphian weight of this vision.

Meaning mirror or reflection in Arabic, *Maraya* focuses on the re-appearance of Vancouver's False Creek in the Arabian desert as the Dubai Marina. *The Sisyphian Cart* is the culmination of an ongoing investigation of these large-scale urban developments that share the same architects, engineers and urban planners by the Vancouver-based collaborative team of artists M. Simon Levin and Henry Tsang and cultural theorist/writer Glen Lowry. Previous projects by the *Maraya* project have included exhibitions at the Museum of Vancouver, ISEA2014 in Dubai, Art

Dubai, Centre A, Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, outdoor projections and installations, public talks and walks, and an interactive Online Platform ([marayaprojects.com](http://marayaprojects.com)).

The neighbourhoods of False Creek represent a new form of urbanism, heralded by architecture critic Trevor Boddy and others as Vancouverism, a homegrown response to an outmoded Manhattanism. Indeed, it was the transformation of the post-Expo'86 lands that attracted the attention of Dubai-based EMAAR Properties to realize a new version of False Creek in the Arabian Desert. As a result, Vancouver's towers of glass and steel set amongst urban waterfronts have become synonymous with an emerging global city built for and populated by newly mobile middle classes from the Middle East and Asia. Against this backdrop, the *Sisyphian Cart* functions as a foil that challenges the audience to consider the vital social processes that are lost behind the proliferation of glass and steel facades. Cities as apparently distant and disparate as Vancouver and Dubai have become key sites in unfolding the narrative of neo-liberal mobilities. The historic flow of ideas, people and money between Vancouver to Dubai is a story that binds developers and planners to the goals of capital; it chronicles a zealous faith in returns on investment—rather than addressing concerns around

affordable housing, public amenities and usability and the importance of growing civic involvement. We ask, what is missing in this spatial collusion of urban mega developments, real estate speculation and city planning? Is the promise of the livable city another marketing ploy to lure tourist dollars and the capricious flow of international investment? Set amidst the false “green” of Vancouver and the genuine “bling” of Dubai, the *Sisyphian Cart* reflects the desires of these cities to compete for attention on the world stage, upstaging the local inhabitants in the search for global capital.



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— **Kate Armstrong and Malcolm Levy**

Artistic Directors ISEA2015

## ISEA International

ISEA International is pleased to present the 21st International Symposium on Electronic Art –ISEA2015– in Vancouver this year. Since 1988 ISEA has been situated at the global frontier of digital media, creating an open discourse around electronic art, science, interdisciplinarity and culture.

In 1989 Tim Berners Lee sat down to begin the www, http and html protocols for a barely understood internet. From speculations on the nature of hypertext and notions of supreme multimedia at early ISEA symposia, through to hybridized internet spaces in the mid 2000's, academics and artists - in many situations one and the same - have simultaneously developed and explored the nature of interactivity. Our relationship to technology has been scrutinized and extended through creativity and academic debate. Such is the work presented at symposia and art events held annually, in cities from Utrecht to Dubai.

In an era where the term technology has received the prefixes of eco, nano and bio, the transitioned state of contemporary culture under the impact of electronic media made it possible to hear casually in the halls of ISEA2013 Sydney that culture had become electronic. It is in this hybrid diversity of nomadic journeying, typical of contemporary culture, that ISEA is so well located. Twenty years after Montreal hosted the sixth ISEA, the event has returned to Canada –to be hosted by Simon Fraser University in Vancouver– for the foremost iteration of what has become electronic heritage.

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