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POSTCARD



**Lee Henderson**  
*Blueprint for a New Gravity*

January 11 - February 16, 2008  
Reception: Friday, January 11, 8pm

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THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE

## MEDIATION, MEDITATION, SEDIMENTATION: A LOCKED ROOM PUZZLE



*Mountains and Rivers, 2004*

### Clues:

The Buddha slept on his left side; as a consequence his dreams were full of riotous colour.

Being plunged suddenly into water often leads to spatial disorientation; watch the bubbles, they will lead you to the surface.

Just because this is happening inside your head doesn't mean it isn't real.

A circle has no beginning.

For a long time I struggled to understand and articulate both my attraction to Lee Henderson's work, and the feeling of familiarity it offers. He engages his audience with the merest of guidance by positioning his viewers in a participatory role with his work, without necessarily demanding anything of them. For instance, even in works where we, as viewers, are simply watching a screen, we immediately invest in the image and participate intellectually, subsumed in an unexpected aura of intimacy generated by the piece.

Henderson's investigations of Buddhist thought and symbol in relation to popular culture and technology lure audiences into pieces that are engaging, challenging, and humorous. For example, in *Untitled Zenga #6*, the banal image of a windshield wiper periodically erasing raindrops from glass, is re-contextualized to become a hypnotic metaphor for meditation. Or, as seen in *Mountains and Rivers*, a video camera is anthropomorphized as it struggles to auto-focus on a meditation cushion through a piece of glass, constantly slipping back and forth between the glass and the cushion, its efforts to focus akin to an attempt to discipline the mind. Even Henderson's own image in the video *Ma: time/space*, as he records himself meticulously remaking a hotel room so as to remove all traces of his having stayed there, and leaving it in precisely the same state as when he entered it the day before (one can only imagine the maid's confusion), uncovers questions of existence as it is linked with evidence thereof. It is Henderson's sense of play and his willingness to trust his intuition that enable viewers to reach a moment of clarity initiated by the work. Seductive in their attention to phenomenology and beguiling in their simplicity, his works are mischievous and clever.

It is the underpinnings of the classic whodunit novel that Lee Henderson has somehow captured and transformed into a visual experience. Masterfully choreographing the narrative of viewing, Henderson provides enough clues to enable us to speculate meaningfully as the "story" unfolds and to successfully arrive at the solution. Perhaps this is an odd metaphor for the Zen-like installations, videos and photographs, but I believe it is valid.

*Ma [time/space]*



Let me draw the parallel further. In the whodunit, the puzzle is paramount. The reader is not expected to develop cathartic rapport with the characters through vicarious experience; in fact, there is often an emotional distance supporting objectivity. Similarly, in Henderson's video installation *Blueprint for a New Gravity*, the puzzle takes precedence. We are invited into an alien space, a dimly lit room containing two unlikely objects: a piece of fossil-laden Tyndall stone and a wooden pallet, each with a history both impersonal and potent. The evidence of a particular human hand is absent. Instead it is the materials that speak. The image projected is not of a person with whom we might connect; rather, it is like one of the characters in a novel, a trope, potentially heavy with meaning, but equally potentially empty of meaning. An existential conundrum presents itself.

The experience of reading a whodunit is pleasurable because we are invited to participate in the journey, to enter into speculation side by side with the author, and to solve the case neck and neck with the detective. In *Blueprint for a New Gravity*, we as viewers are invited to become the amateur detective; to place ourselves in the spotlight of the piece, and to find the clues it has to offer. In activating the technology of the piece, we engage the subversive aspects as well. We adopt a physical posture and discover ourselves involuntarily reflecting the projected image. Quickly deciphering the narrative, we anticipate and construct the resolution of the plot line at an accelerated pace to that of the projection. Essentially, we are captive to our desire to see our speculations confirmed or contradicted.

The mystery writer offers the reader and the novel's detective the same threads, so the reader never feels condescended or outdone by off-stage activity. If one grabs hold of the right bit of string and tugs, the whole mystery will unravel into a series of discernible events. The visual artist sets into a motion a mental cascade instigated by the presented image. The viewer arrives at a conclusion, the internal solution of which is not truly presented by the video, but rather by the conflation of the materials at hand, the image presented, and the viewer's mind whirling through the piece, connecting these two things to human experience. The viewer experiences a fleeting instant of epiphany.



Blueprint for a New Gravity investigates the ephemeral. The stone, at once fluxing and fixed, reveals itself as part of a geological clock describing the activities of creatures traversing mud 450 million years ago; the pallet recalls the forest and the temporary harnessing of carbon through respiration; the video is a briefly displayed projection of light which persists in the viewer's mind beyond the duration of the viewing. The image itself leads us directly to questions of change, transition, and impermanence. While the latter are relevant and well-conceived components of the piece, Henderson's work comes from and elicits a visceral response to the images and is supported by a layer of whimsy and tongue-in-cheek humour. While he is cognisant of the text his images project, the subtext is a discernible wink and an approving nod as the viewer undoes the packaging and discovers a large helping of irony. Sometimes the viewer leaves chuckling, sometimes quiet and introspective, but inevitably feeling as if he or she has just glimpsed the solution to an ancient riddle presented by a Zen master.

This is a piece that needs to be experienced. As the viewer/reader/detective, you are at the centre of this particular locked room puzzle. Though the door is closed and there is apparently no way in or out, the event has occurred and you have the means to solve it. If I were to tell you now, "it was Colonel Mustard in the drawing room with the candlestick," you would never forgive me for giving away the ending. So I will just say, "We must use the little grey cells" and stroke my very fine moustache.

©2007, *Seema Goel*

*Untitled Zenga #6, 2003*





*Hilary Knutson - Director*

*Caitlin Thompson - Assistant Director*

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**STRIDE GALLERY**

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Gallery hours: 11 AM - 5 PM, Tuesday - Saturday  
Admission is free and everyone is welcome.



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**Artist Biography:**

*Lee Henderson* is a media-based artist from Saskatchewan, Canada. He has studied art in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Germany, with talented professionals including Maria Vedder, Brian Eno and Rachelle Viader Knowles. His work has been exhibited in Canada, Germany, the UK and the US, and he has worked at Canadian Artist-Run Centres EMMEDIA and Neutral Ground, and at the MacKenzie Art Gallery. Since completing his MFA in Intermedia, he has been furthering his time- and lens- based artistic practice while teaching art and computer science at the University of Regina. His installations, videos and performances revolve around investigations of impermanence and mortality, philosophy and Buddhist symbol from within the framework of Western culture and media.

**Writer Biography:**

*Seema Goel* is a sculptor and writer living in Regina Saskatchewan. She does not have a moustache except when reading Agatha Christie novels and manifesting her favourite moustache pomading, hot-chocolate sipping, Belgian detective Hercule Poirot.