



Matt Macintosh | *Type and Token*

# *introduction*

Matt Macintosh is an emerging artist of note based out of Ramara, a township just outside of Orillia in Simcoe County. The MacLaren Art Centre is pleased to present a solo exhibition of his work, *Type and Token*, which runs from March 14 through June 21, 2015 in the Janice Laking Gallery.

Macintosh's roots in the region begin with a small cottage in Ramara, where his family summered during his childhood. Travelling past Barrie on the 400 as a child, he remembers the pink-insulated suburbs springing up around the city as it grew southwards towards Toronto. Relocating here after finishing his graduate studies, he began applying his own interests in systematized abstraction to the history of Barrie and the way the city slowly coalesced around the Nine Mile Portage and expanded out.

Macintosh takes his title from the distinction between "types" or concepts, and "tokens," the instances that embody these concepts—in this case, the concept is broader European settlement and its instance is the distinctive history of Barrie. Much of the work in the exhibition originates in holdings from the

Simcoe County Archives and the artist's own experiences walking the long length of the Nine Mile Portage. While the exhibition's focus is sited and intimate, its implications are wide-ranging.

*Type and Token* is complemented by an essay by emerging Toronto-based writer Heather White. Her poetic response departs from the unconscious patterns of water damage on Macintosh's monumental maps. In the essay, White follows the spread of "ignorant cartographers": rivers, creeks and mildew. While tethered to the exhibition, White's response—like *Type and Token* itself—spreads outwards, flowing in and out of the layered histories of the region and beyond. As White reminds us: "we forget we were cartographers; we live here like *here* was always understood this way, and had to be."

—EMILY McKIBBON, Exhibition Curator





# *ignorant maps and their lessons*

What do you want?

Who wants to know? A teenager, rolling her eyes? A shopkeeper, eager for the sale? A psychotherapist, shifting to uncover something with you?

If it's an archivist asking, you best have your answer prepared. The archivist guards a collection, and attempts to locate what others are looking for in it. When you approach one, searching, it's best to be specific. Requests that are too eager to meander, questions that are too much like rivers, are harder to honour, so they risk more refusals. Remember: the archivist exists to defend against encroachment and erosion. You would set off the archive's alarms, arriving with the coursing ambitions, and staining effects, of a creek.

The green works hanging here began as maps of this town that Matt Macintosh requested at the Simcoe County Archives. He took their scans (originals can't leave the premises) and printed them tinted, blanked, and split. He rotated the results into the portrait orientation. They're still maps, but now they're personal.

The poet Elizabeth Bishop, in *Song for the Rainy Season*, writes of "... a wall / for the mildew's / ignorant map." Mildew eschews the cartographer's established rules and purposes. Mildew spreads stains on surfaces without documenting anything besides itself

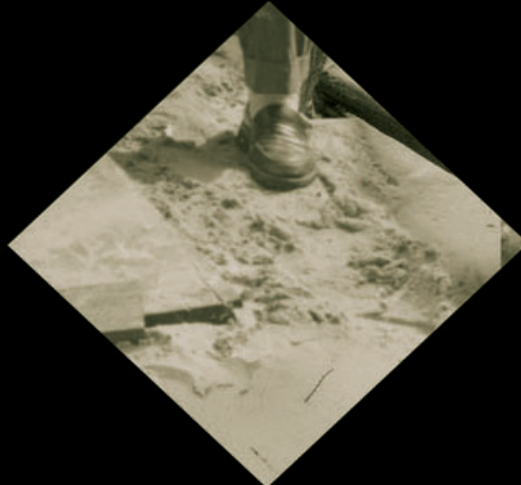
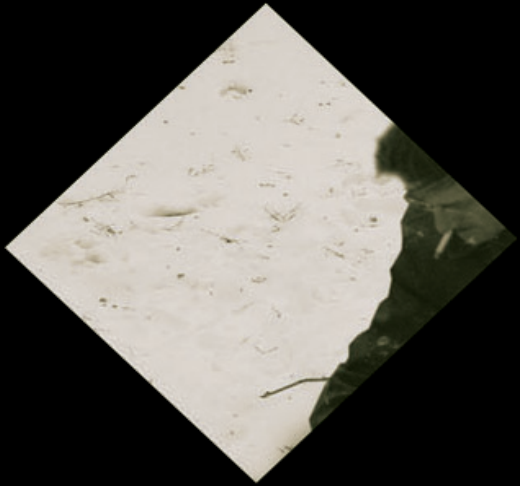
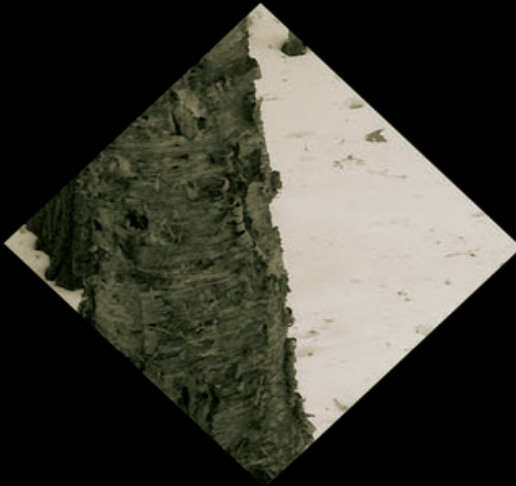
or aspiring to a bird's vantage or trying to make a place legible to someone who hasn't been there. Perhaps only a poet, who works to uncoil, slowly, the tightly wound springs of language, would give the name *map* to what's left by a living thing that seems to move so freely. Perhaps only a poet, with the power to drain our insults of their judgments, would call a map *ignorant*, as if we could be oriented by an image without knowledge.

Poetically, from the green works, Macintosh has redacted most of the cartographers' marks but left the traces of the papers' demise. The compositions emerge from dark patches of water damage and patterns of thinned pulp made by persistent folds. These maps show where the archivists couldn't get in enough time to stop time. They're about the features that make documents more unique and less uniform. These works frustrate archives, or expand them, by honouring the work of the ignorant cartographers.

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Water champions ignorance, wills it. An emblem of unknowing, water promises forgetting and oblivion, innocence and bliss. In ancient Greek mythology, the dying drank from a river (the Lethe) in order to unburden themselves of what they knew so that, thus made naive, they could find peace.

What do you want?





Water, which is not mute, ignores the question, or doesn't answer in speech. It answers by flowing; as Margaret Atwood wrote in *The Penelopiad*, "water always goes where it wants to go." The passage continues: "Remember that, my child. Remember you are half water. If you can't go through an obstacle, go around it. Water does." Children, we might ape water in its spirit of irreverence. Followers, we might trace the literal paths water leaves. Mildew does.

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Macintosh traversed the portage, all nine miles several times, listening carefully. He listened especially for what he knew he couldn't understand. When he heard a nonhuman sound, he took its photo. Predictably and like ghosts, the sounds don't show up in the prints. The images don't prove anything, but may jog the memory of the artist.

Sound has a different relation to knowledge than does vision. Sounds are less wieldy than sights, and may be more watery: harder to capture and to quantify, more moving. Every sound may be something of an escape artist. Oral histories have that magic to them; they keep something alive that would wither if pinned to a page, a map, an archive.

Later, Macintosh recreated what he'd heard. He used sounds of people and their processes: construction noises, for example.

He also used clips of invasive bird species, which he found using what may be the most human invention of all: the internet. The soundtrack that results is a collection of pronunciations, made in a thick accent of artifice, by a non-native speaker who is no-one in particular. The translations move from one language we don't understand to another. We don't know what these stories are, or if they are stories at all. There's no discernible legend.

Myths are passed along to share ideas, to ease anxieties around unknowns, to fantasize about what's strange, to create a community among listeners. On a map, a legend works similarly, linking patterns that would otherwise lack meaning to categories we can process: open space; future urban; sandy hollow. Legends make legible by translating the signs we don't understand into ones that we do. Like a portage, they carry us between. They facilitate exchange.

But Macintosh has lifted the shapes that legends would explain away from the words that would resolve them. He offers their outlines as keyholes for us to spy through as we keep our ears open for others' approaches.

\* \* \*

Perhaps questions of desire and identity are best asked in the past tense. So: what *did* you want? Who *wanted* to know?

Such questions may get easier to answer in hindsight, since motives refine in retrospect. That water goes where it wants doesn't mean it knows where it's going while it goes. We're always searching for the search. At the end, looking back, the whys seem more clear.

These questions also becomes more unsettling—so, arguably, more important to ask—as time elapses. We're so quick to forget past processes. We erase our search histories. We forget we were ignorant, and we forget we were cartographers; we live here like *here* was always understood this way, and had to be.

But we might remember, here, that all maps are personal. That we were and are always wanting. That want leaves its traces, on land, in water, on maps, in archives, on pages, in museums. If you want to know.

—HEATHER WHITE, Guest Essayist

**MATT MACINTOSH** is a graduate of the Master of Visual Studies programme at the University of Toronto. His work has been featured in solo and two-person exhibitions at Gallery 44, Toronto; Culturehall, New York; Toronto Image Works; University of Toronto Art Centre; Verb Gallery, Kingston; and others.

**HEATHER WHITE** received her BA in Contemporary Studies (University of King's College, Halifax) and her MA in Philosophy and Art (State University of New York, Manhattan). She has written on art for major publications and galleries, and received a writing prize from the Canadian Art Foundation in 2013. She currently attends the Toronto Institute of Relational Psychotherapy, and practises in Toronto as a therapist-in-training.









## Acknowledgements

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Installation view of *Type and Token* (Cover, page 3)

Matt Macintosh, *Institutional*, 2015, inkjet print, 22.8 x 25.4 cm (Page 5)

Matt Macintosh, *District Centre*, 2015, inkjet print, 22.8 x 25.4 cm (Page 7)

Matt Macintosh, *Water Pollution Control Centre*, 2015, inkjet print, 22.8 x 25.4 cm (Page 7)

Matt Macintosh, *Special Industrial*, 2015, inkjet print, 22.8 x 25.4 cm (Page 8)

Matt Macintosh, *Extractive Industrial*, 2015, inkjet print, 22.8 x 25.4 cm (Page 8)

Matt Macintosh, *Vessel (Nancy)* (detail), 2015, wood, paper, glass, ratchet straps, canoe, insulation bats, ash, texts, metal, 569 x 124.5 x 465 cm (Page 9)

Matt Macintosh, *Accession # 2006-08: Plan of the Town of Barrie; Wm Hawkins 1833*, 2015, inkjet on archival liner paper, 243.8 x 170 cm (Page 10)

Photography: Cover, pages 3, 9, André Beneteau; Pages 5, 7, 8, 10, Courtesy the artist.

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