

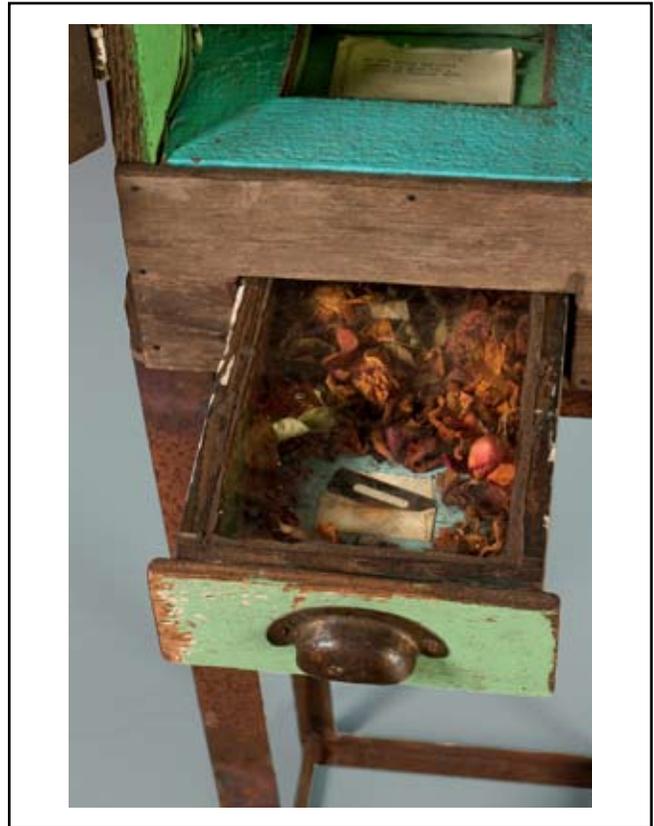
my name is scot  
promise

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BY KIRSTIE LANG

Artist's Statement

my name is scot



**my name is scot**  
by Kirstie Lang, 2001

my name is scot is a sculptor and installation artist living in Vancouver. Since graduating from Emily Carr College of Art and Design in 1992 he has shown extensively, and worked in a variety of media. His assemblage boxes (wooden containers whose many compartments hold found objects) and his large-

my name is scot  
*Promise*, 1993

mixed media sculpture  
(154 x 33 x 42 cm)  
SAG 1996.02.01

Photograph by Cameron Heryet

scale, wooden structures have appeared throughout the Lower Mainland in art galleries such as the Surrey Art Gallery (1996, 1998), Monty Clarke, the Western Front and the Pitt Gallery (1996), Access Artist Run Centre (1994), and Artemisia (1993), as well as at the Vancouver Holocaust Centre (1995). He has created installations (multi-media works that are made in response to the size, qualities and purposes of the exhibition space) in various non-art specific environments, such as *hollywood not* (2000), in which signs commonly used by film crews were re-created and installed at intersections near movie shoots, and *(un)spoken words* (1997), which saw text placed in alleyways of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. He has mounted solo exhibitions of the photo-based exhibition *depiction* in Winnipeg (Floating Gallery, 1999) and Seattle (Oculus Gallery 1999), and combined his use of assemblage, site specific installation and explored notions of performance in a group installation at the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Bulgaria (2000). The barn on the family farm in Richmond is where the artist attributes his early interest in large, wooden structures; it is currently the storage site for many pieces, as well as materials for upcoming works of this nature. His urban studio is at the Cordova Institute, a visual arts studio collective in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. His work is in the collection of the Surrey Art Gallery, as well as in private collections in Canada, the United States and Europe.

my name is scot uses discarded objects as his materials. He recycles wood, pieces of lumber complete with their previous paint, stains and old nail holes. From these materials he creates "psychic structures:" boxes that we may open, or rooms that we can enter. These might be corridors through which we can travel, as in *structure for investigation* (1995), and the mazes of *Lost & Found: Re-Membering the*



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*Body* which showed at the Surrey Art Gallery (1996). Or we might find ourselves crawling through *bottom/top* (2000), a series of covered bunk beds in a gallery space entirely draped with floor to ceiling pink woollen blankets. Our experience of these structures is heightened by the use of light and sound. Lightbulbs illuminate objects and our bodies. They also cast shadows, creating dark areas, hidden corners. Doors creak on hinges, our footsteps are heard on floorboards, and external sounds are muffled when we are enclosed.

Using the objects of others, my name is scot reclaims them and offers them to the visitor to do the same. Recycled things elicit a certain empathy, in that that they have lived elsewhere, had prior meaning and purpose (Stockholder 1987). As a result of our interaction with them, we are invited to question how we ourselves impart meaning to objects, and vice versa, how we use objects to construct our own identity. This practice has a tradition in twentieth-century, Western art, from the work of the Dadaists in Europe early in the century, to late-century Canadian artists Eric Metcalfe, Al Neil, Richard Prince and Kelly Mark. The use of found objects breaks down the preciousness of materials, and stretches the boundaries and traditions of art, as well as expanding the ways and means of creating works of art (Madill 2000). The message is that art is not distinct from a physical or social background, but integrated with the world of objects. Placed in a gallery environment, found objects and their outside, daily-life referents or counterparts draw our attention to the gallery itself: the ways it participates in how meaning is made of such art and its practices. The artist also reminds us that even new objects are not new; every material has rawer materials, processes through which it is created, and involves people who activate those processes who themselves have histories. The act

of construction is at the core of the philosophy of my name is scot.

The process of interpreting his art is a visceral one - we are always reminded that our consciousness is contextualized in the body. In this sense he feels an affinity with the work of photographer Diana Thorneycroft, who explores the psyche by depicting extreme physical states (scot 2001). my name is scot's intention therefore is to create a heightened state of awareness that is experienced in the body, in the present. Despite the lived history of the materials he uses and their aura of the time that has passed, my name is scot aims to disrupt wistful thoughts of nostalgia and replace them with edgy physical restraints. Such physically involving "psychic structures" have the potential to catalyse a re-remembering in relation to the viewer's personal, past experience - a momentary shock of memory - the psychic flavour of which will depend upon that particular embodied experience. And in regards to the future, though we may feel a sense of risk and vulnerability when we open or enter one of these structures, projections of "What is going to happen?" and "Am I safe in here?" are tempered by the knowledge that this is a construction - it is safe, and to be savoured precisely for the value of that momentary fear (Davison 1995). Installation artists Ann Hamilton and Jessica Stockholder may be seen as contemporaries who share this interest.

Through our interactions with his work, we become aware of the physical ways in which we process information, and also the incorporation of my name is scot's body into the making of the work (scot 1995). This reflects the artist's studies in performance art. An artform that emerged in the North America

of the 1960's, performance art makes heavy use of time, space and the body. Audiences might consider



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the early work of Vancouver artists such as Gathie Falk and Kate Craig. A physical action of some kind typically occurs as part of the showing of the work, in direct contrast to a stable artwork that is controlled, displayed, catalogued, and kept in a vault or sold on the art market. Issues of control and its loss arise in art of a performative nature. Grounded as we are in our bodies while bearing witness to the work, by its scale or by the process of journeying through it, we also confront experiences of confinement in small spaces, visibility restricted by keyholes, low lighting or doors that don't fully open, as was the case in his *small rooms hold big secrets* (1993). It is not a remote, aesthetic distance from which this art is viewed. It is touched, smelled, listened to, just as we are touched, smelled and listened ourselves, by ourselves, when we engage with it.

When confronting this artist's work, reviewers have often written of their urges to savour their solitude, at the same time as they crave human connection (Hamel 1995). These urges might be attributed to the state of human incorporeality, a type of out-of-body condition of the early twenty-first century. To be specific, these works speak to the difficulties in identifying with, and taking ownership of one's body in an era of post-industrialization, when cultural (and work) spaces are global, the clock never shuts off, and sensory information is packaged digitally and exchanged through "virtual" reality. Another aspect of current consciousness, post-modernity has replaced the notion of an integrated identity (a sense of self) with a socially constructed model of human consciousness. Works by my name is scot certainly show these symptoms, much like artists Ken Lum and Jin-me Yoon address the subject of identities which are both negotiated and located. my name is scot offers a remedy: the chance for viewers to reconnect with the body, re-claim it, and identify

compassionately with the bodies and experiences of others.

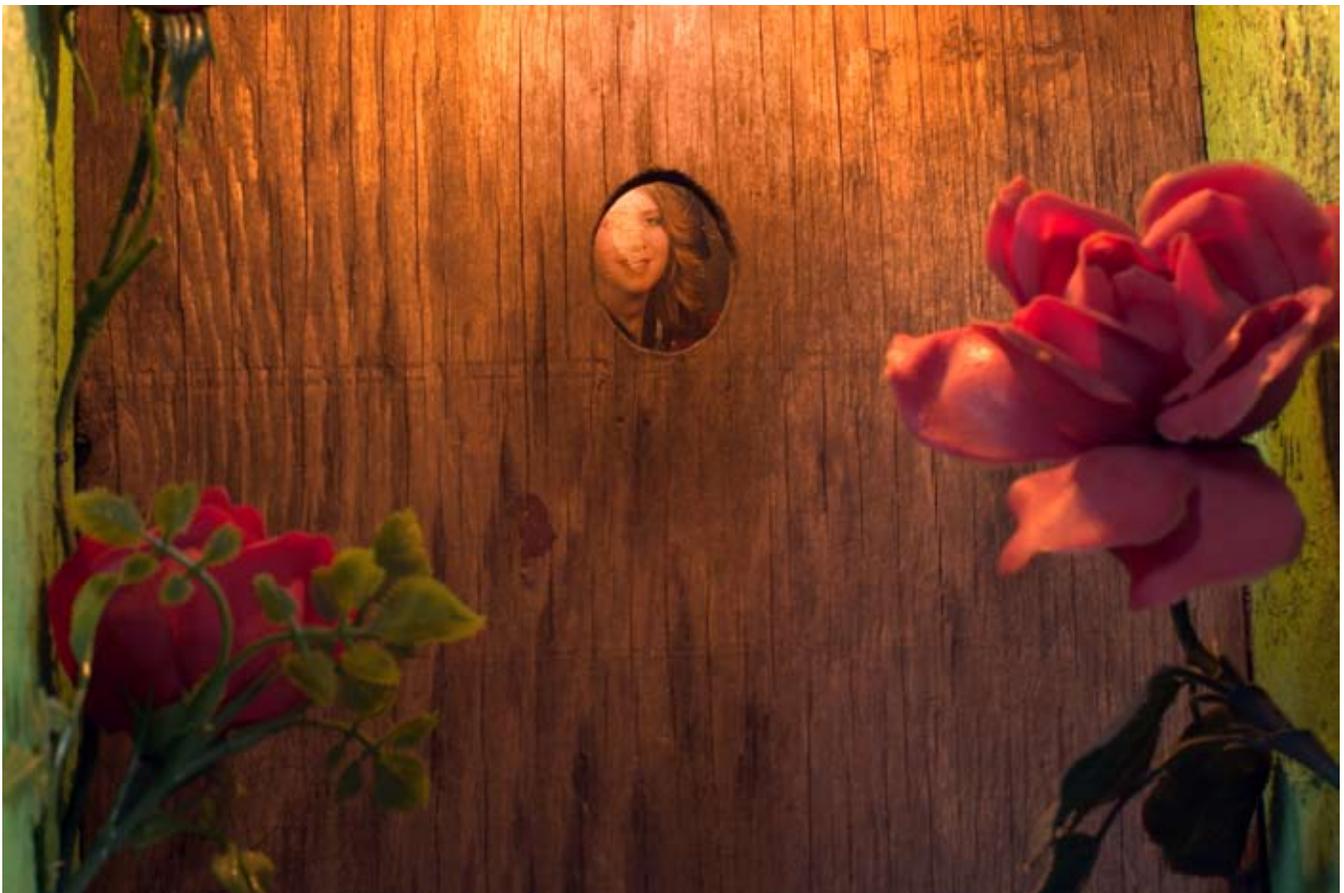
The work *promise* (1996) was launched through a sense of compassion. my name is scot writes that its raw materials are "the personal effects found discarded in an alley behind my studio in the downtown Eastside of Vancouver" (scot 1996). That the collection of objects represented a personal history was clear to him. Likewise was the fact that the artist had no further access to that history beyond what he had found in that alley. But laid out before him was the job to re-investigate the very constructions of identity, using these objects in new ways.

*promise* is a torso-sized structure, not one into which we can physically step inside. Its box and metal stand make up the height of an adult. How do we feel in relation to this piece, given its scale? As an artwork, something 5' (154 cm) tall is considered large. Viewed from the outside it is a box whose covering doors are made of slats of wood. Inside are two seven watt lightbulbs, which dimly illuminate the rose coloured glass in the squares between wooden slats. A small, round opening glows from above like an all-seeing eye, like an oculus, the central window in the facade of a Gothic church. From this perspective *promise* resembles a small building with many windows, and in comparison we are made to feel like giants. Or it could be the lattice work of a tiny garden, through which roses are visible. But open the doors and we find ourselves peering into a box once again, filled with a collection of objects that are associated with romance and intimacy, emotions that arouse feelings of care, and a sense of responsibility for something fragile that is almost impossible to bear. Already, the scale of *promise* creates a set of relationships with the viewer that constantly shift.

Inside the box we find many more compartments, hidden secrets that allude to human potential, to what could be. On the floor of the main segment is a rectangular depression. In it, protected by glass is a small index card, on which is written the words: "On a sunny day this coupon is good for a picnic at Stanley Park." Gaze upward again, past the imitation roses, and one finds an oval hole cut into the back wall of the box that leads to a back chamber. Through this opening a photograph of a woman appears. She is young and blonde, wearing a graduation cap and gown. She holds a bunch of roses. Above this central container is another, smaller one, like an attic to a house. Viewed through the glowing oculus, it reveals a floor covered with inset rose thorns, and the word

"promise" appears in a small, carved hole. It could be a signpost for interpreting the box's objects; the coupon pledges a gift, the photo features a person at the pinnacle of her becoming. Why, then, are there prickly thorns above it? Why down below do we find a drawer filled with dried rose petals, and a razor blade covered in rust?

The artist describes the context for the work in relation to this notion of "promise." Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, where his studio is located, has been described by the media as "the poorest postal code in the country." It is a neighbourhood made infamous by sex and drug trades, homelessness and poverty, and the murders of over fifty women who have mysteriously disappeared from the area over



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the last eighteen years (Matas 2001). Directly behind the studio of my name is scot is a series of rooming houses, temporary residences from which people are routinely evicted if they don't flee first, leaving their personal belongings behind. It is common to find such abandoned objects strewn in the streets and alleys, as my name is scot did the photograph, the coupon, and the razor. As such it is an endless resource, supplying materials for photo-based works such as *depiction* (1999) and the multi-media pieces in *waste* (2001-02).

It is sometimes the case that an artist in his position, working with found objects as part of his practice, is accused of taking advantage of the situation, aestheticizing it. But what is an artist to do when recycling objects is a tradition in art in general, and the crux of his art in particular? When these objects are his physical, daily environment? When faces in the Missing Persons pages are known to him? my name is scot uses a series of strategies. He overcomes distant finger-wagging with physical involvement. He works with private objects by burying some of their details. And he presents constructions while asking questions.

He assumes the objects he found belonged to a young woman who once lived or worked in the area (scot 2001). His work gives her form by weaving together her photo, coupon (from her child?) and razor (from a lover?) with other objects. These are assembled in spatial relationships that demand from the viewer an active role in seeking them out, opening doors and drawers, peering through holes. This invitation to manipulate increases the desire to see for oneself and thereby experience the work physically. It also reinforces the artist's belief that the viewer constructs his or her own meaning of things, and does so by choice or necessity.

So we are asked to become involved with the work, and yet, the artist places limits on knowledge that may be "fixed" or pinned down, forcing us to form our own stories. The photograph is visible, but physically unreachable. This is in part because, as my name is scot explains, there is in fact handwriting on the back of the photo. It is a note to another person apologizing for past mistakes, promising a party in the future. To allude here to this message keeps its import open - we can only wonder about loss in general, why people go missing, "why people become lost to themselves" (scot 2001). To incorporate the actual note in the work the artist feels would be too specific for the viewer, and too personal an intrusion for its former owner. Instead we confront the woman's physical body: the attributes she was born with (bone structure, hair and eye colour), and those she constructs (her expression). my name is scot feels that the important questions he would like his photo-based work to raise have to do with the idea of gesture or pose. Where do poses come from? Why are they constructed? Where do your poses, and by extension, your narratives come from? (scot 2001)

my name is scot makes overt the ways identity is constructed. In a wooden structure, he assembles the found objects - from the alley and elsewhere - in formal, or structural, relation with each other. Structures exist all around us, whether they are popular philosophies on how to lead a good life, or architectural spaces that dictate certain codes of behaviour. These structures are human-made. They help us to "organise our desires and fears, and thus our perceptions and sense of identity" (Wallace 1998). But how much control do we have over them, and they over us? Who is included in them? Who gets cast out, left out or simply not considered? What happens to those people? These are questions

suggested by the containers of objects this artist creates.

That these boxes are filled with a mixture of “real” and “fake” objects peels away another layer in issues of identity, and ideals. Are the stains on the razor envelope rust, or blood, or seepage from rose petals? Are the plastic flowers any less real (or symbolically useful) than the dried petals and thorns, or the roses in the photograph? Do dime-store objects such as plastic flowers make an artwork “kitsch,” and less rigorous than “fine art”? Is it appropriate to be reminded of the song lyric “I never promised you a rose garden,” even without knowing that it played in the mind of the artist while he constructed the piece (scot 2001)? For my name is scot, the humorous, the absurd, and the tragic hold equal weight in his open-ended re-telling of stories.

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## Artist's Statement (1995)

my name is scot and i build objects and situations for you to consider the construction/occlusion of self.with. i like to use light dirt wood text located objects and dark to effect environments that implicate my and your body as repository of/reagents for structures that contextualize consciousness. language gender class race plus more and you can touch or think my work but your whole body will always be encouraged and that means smell and fear too also sometimes far off joy from back before or beyond made boundaries of here. catch phrase: the contingency of self upon the contextualization of body. oh and you and I are both others

## Artist's Statement for promise (1996)

my name is scot and *promise* was created from a box of personal effects found discarded in an alley behind my studio in the downtown eastside of Vancouver. The objects appeared as clues, suggestive of a variety of narratives. with much of my early construction work, I used found texts, photographs, images and objects to try and promote a re-telling of personal histories and ultimately a re-investigation of the constructions of identity.

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