

# SURREY ART GALLERY PRESENTS

## (SUB)URBAN EXCHANGE:

East Kilbride.uk <> Surrey.ca

A postcard exchange between youth photographers from Surrey, Canada and East Kilbride, Scotland

(Sub)urban Exchange: EastKilbride.uk <> Surrey.ca

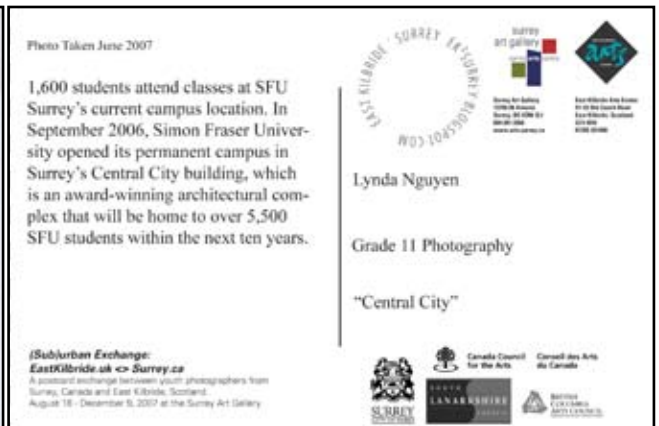
BRIAN FOREMAN

Focusing on the suburban – assigning cultural value

SYLVIA GRACE BORDA

(Sub)urban Exchange: Whalley Becomes City Centre

LAURA HACKETT



**(Sub)urban Exchange:**

For 150 years postcards have preserved and exchanged images of landscapes. Saved as souvenirs, they recall what was considered beautiful or important in specific locations. Artist Sylvia Grace Borda, an avid collector of postcards, approached the Gallery with an idea for an exchange project between youth from Surrey, Canada and East Kilbride, Scotland, two cities with surprisingly similar characteristics. This exhibition presents the contemporary postcards produced by these students exploring the physical and social geography of these two cities.

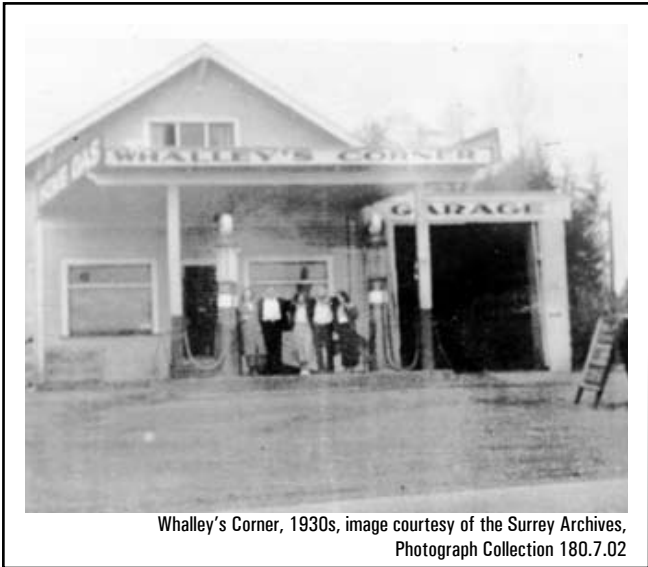
East Kilbride shares with Surrey modern town planning, rapid densification and redevelopment. Both cities are also witnessing changes in their cultural demographics. Teacher Laura Hackett of Surrey’s Enver Creek Secondary School joined with project artist Sylvia Grace Borda, to work with students to create contemporary postcards, videos, and a blog ([www.ek2surrey.blogspot.com](http://www.ek2surrey.blogspot.com)) where students exchanged information, ideas, experiences and images about their two cities.

Students from Surrey’s Enver Creek Secondary School focussed on the transformation of the Whalley



Sylvia Grace Borda, Laura Hackett and Alex, a participating grade 8 student

neighbourhood. They used digital photography to create their own versions of the ‘scenic’ photographic postcard. Their photographs capture a time of change of what was once Whalley’s Corner, a village centre in an agricultural municipality, into an urbanized city through densification, redevelopment and contemporary architecture. Whalley Town Centre, one of six town centres in Surrey, is now emerging as Surrey City Centre, Surrey’s ‘downtown’. Inspired by Sylvia Grace Borda, students learned how to rethink



Whalley’s Corner, 1930s, image courtesy of the Surrey Archives, Photograph Collection 180.7.02



Surrey City Centre, June, 2007 photograph courtesy of Laura Hackett

and image their local environment. Borda knows Surrey well as a result of her 2004 digital photography project Every Bus Stop in Surrey, a component of which is also being presented in the exhibition.

The parallel project in Scotland, led by Borda as an artist in residence, engaged students in considering the changes occurring now in East Kilbride, one of the United Kingdom’s New Towns. Built after WWII, and fuelled by the utopian ideology that people should live in a ‘garden city’, East Kilbride was originally designed to accommodate population overspill from Glasgow. Its common green spaces, once intended to provide better living conditions, today is seen as real estate ripe for housing development. Changing values are making new demands on the town to become a different kind of city. Inspired by the tradition of the ‘composite’ postcard, the students of East Kilbride used collage techniques to reflect upon the changes that they are experiencing in their own community.

The Surrey Art Gallery has a long tradition of exhibiting the art of young people. It annually showcases the work of school students and demonstrates the importance of the arts in education. Through this



Historic MacIntosh Clan Postcard – an example of a ‘composite’ postcard

postcard project students have been encouraged to think about many different subjects: geography, economics, sociology, history, urban planning, architecture. It has also incorporated their interest and facility in digital media. The Gallery recognizes the importance of digital art forms for youth. As with the REMIXX.sur.RE project, the Gallery continues to seek ways to showcase the talent and innovation of youth in their exploration of digital art forms. We are pleased to have been a part of this international exchange.

Brian Foreman,  
Assistant Curator



Installation view of exhibition at East Kilbride Arts Centre



Installation view of exhibition at Surrey Art Gallery

## Focusing on the suburban – assigning cultural value

### Defining the Suburban

Assigning cultural worth is complicated. By our nature, we often value what others express. We seek information to affirm our lifestyle choices, and ultimately, where we choose to live. For example, in defining an urban city, we often compare it to major cultural capitals. World class cities are defined against known markers such as population diversity, recognized museums and entertainment areas, shopping districts, schools, and capital wealth. Our comparisons about a place in relation to another being similar, worse or better is also informed by what we have seen, read, or heard. In this way, what might be of value to one person about a city may be valueless to the next. This is more complicated when it comes to assigning value to a suburb.

Possibly the word 'suburb' itself is an issue. A suburb is defined as a satellite area which has developed on the fringes of a larger city. Already in this definition, the suburb is compared to a more resourced urban zone. In assigning the locative term 'suburb' to a place, we are positioning it in terms of a socio-political framework. The city has resources and structure, whereas the suburb has basic amenities and loosely structured housing. The fact, that the 'suburb' exists to take on a city's overspill and to manage the excesses of residential, industrial and economic growth, is regularly ignored.

In the UK, the term 'New Town' has been an equally misunderstood concept, much like that of a suburb. Communities in both living situations can feel inferior in terms of civic pride, despite the high visionary and social aims of suburban planners. This lack of pride often negatively impacts how local residents feel about where they live.



Sylvia Grace Borda, photograph of East Kilbride, courtesy of the artist

What many do not consider is that suburbs and new towns evolve and can transform into cultural locations. When considering the city of Paris, one thinks of it as a world class cultural capital. Many will probably not be familiar with its layout at the turn of the 20th century, but at that time districts IX-XVI were largely comprised of suburban residences (e.g. cottages, farm lands, new housing and lower economic developments).

**Some background:**

East Kilbride was Scotland’s First New Town. It was a planned community designed to be a satellite to Glasgow city and founded in 1947. Its status as a ‘New Town’ has often been linked with stereotypical attitudes of blandness, and often wrongly associated with an overwhelming number of roundabouts and

dull architectural buildings. These ideas about former New Towns often inform the public to consider these places as secondary locations for habitation and recreation. This rationale is particularly demarked in the minds of citizens who, when asked to name interesting cities in Scotland, will list other locales with more historical architectural landmarks, natural features and design (typically pre-dating the 1950s). Like Surrey, East Kilbride has been built across agricultural lands, merging older farming villages into its district.

Surrey is Canada’s fastest developing city. It occupies 380 square kilometer and is the largest of the metropolitan cities associated within the Lower Mainland district (Vancouver, New Westminster, Burnaby, TriCities, West Vancouver, North Vancouver, Richmond and Delta). With over 3100 houses being built every 6 months, its population and economy are moving rapidly. Similar to East Kilbride, it is in a continual state of renewal and regeneration, seeking to attract new residents, development opportunities, and jobs. Where traditional cities cannot accommodate horizontal and vertical expansion across the land, places like East Kilbride and Surrey can grow due to their parcel assignments, planning regulations, and relatively young civic histories, in contrast to their ‘parent’ city.

With these younger cities moving forward with continual expansion, older district areas within them are often rezoned for redevelopment. The possibility of an individual witnessing the redevelopment of land parcels several times in their lifetime is high. Where there are open spaces and low density, development is ripe. Older district areas, such as the original village of Whalley in Surrey, are being redeveloped for commercial retail units, shopping, and apartment dwellings. The density of the area will



New highrise apartment building, photograph courtesy of Dana Rowland and Rikki Rebantand

increase by 5000x. The physical character, associated histories, and residents will also disappear in this transformation.

In East Kilbride, the city was designed to accommodate primary schools with 2 acres of land and secondary schools with 8 acres. In a utopian era of Modernist urban planning, the schools and community centres were assigned the best parcels of land for development. Schools, halls, and centres, all reside on hills, in valleys, or in viewing corridors. It was thought no one member of the public should benefit, but rather the whole community from these well situated resources. Now 60 years on, capital demands have shifted the market place. Developers have negotiated to build new schools on smaller land parcels, and use remaining grounds for residential units.

In its time, East Kilbride represented a new cultural shift in thinking post World War II. The lofty ideals that drove the planning of the town are manifested in the work of leading architects of the day, such as Sir Basil Spence, Jack Coia, and artists Crosbie,

and of New Town artists Spencer, Harding, Dean, Donnelly and others. Both architects and artists were ready and willing to contribute to the posterity of this fledgling city for the general benefit and welfare of its citizens, although none of these aspirations remain well chronicled or even discussed. As a result, some of the finest examples of Modernist architecture and public art have become susceptible to vandalism, neglect and abandonment.

A substantial part of Surrey's housing follows the same chronological development times to East Kilbride. Until recently, the Surrey landscape was dominated by 1940s cottage-style and post war homes, farms, and a mix of Modernist residential family units developed from the mid-1950s to 1970s. While no particular architectural firms are readily associated with Surrey's early growth, the city did sustain a focus on residential development over the last 50 years. The "Vancouver special" referred to box-like houses dominating the landscape during the 1970-80s and demarked a cultural shift in housing. These houses were characterized



Sylvia Grace Borda, a school campus in East Kilbride, courtesy of the artist.



Sylvia Grace Borda, *Every Bus Stop in Surrey, BC, 2004*, digital photograph Collection of the Surrey Art Gallery.

by white stucco, low pitched roofs, second floor front balconies, and large square footage floor plans. They were seen as desirable by incoming immigrant communities who demanded more living space than garden allocations. All of these homes, from pre-war to contemporary box style, once prevalent in Surrey are now becoming scarce. Much like the situation for East Kilbride schools, the land on which these units reside is seen as lucrative; and the resulting redevelopment has not considered the recording or conservation of older structures.

While change is inevitable – a social awareness can create a continuity and ‘memory’ about how landscapes have been and have changed. Interestingly, both East Kilbride and Surrey have few photo documents, postcards, or tourist ephemera to promote the city among local residents and visitors. As a result, East Kilbride residents are left to assign their town with images synonymous with Scotland’s historic and medieval past rather than with its own recent history associated with Modernist social urban development.

In Surrey residents are exposed to ephemera mainly related to Vancouver and other spots of natural beauty in the province, despite the city sustaining well over 400 urban parks and several nature reserves.

#### **(Sub)urban Exchange:**

In the exhibition, (Sub)urban Exchange: East Kilbride.uk <> Surrey.ca, the two cities of East Kilbride (Scotland) and Surrey (Canada) partnered together to form a cultural exchange through postcards and to illustrate the cultural dynamics of each locale.

This unique partnership was also based on several mutual objectives, namely:

- i. Give participating communities the ability to respond to their environment before it changes;
- ii. Raise the profile of the legacy new cities play in the continued relevance to the community fabric and surrounding geographic areas;
- iii. Celebrate cities which don’t have contemporary postcards of their own area;
- iv. Initiate a cross cultural exchange to commemorate East Kilbride’s 60th Anniversary celebrations (1947-

2007) and its ties to Canadian heritage (nearly 4.5 million Scots left for Canada in the last century);  
 v. Create a public community archive and artwork made by residents.

The main exhibition work involved both East Kilbride and Surrey school students and their participation in workshops led by community, visual art and architectural experts who provided the students with an opportunity to foster dialogue about what makes their new urban areas unique.



Enver Creek Students on a photography outing,  
 photograph courtesy of Monjot Deol and Alex Nguyen

As an integral part of the workshops, students took digital photographs and edited the results to create their own pictorial postcards illustrating where they live, hang out, go to school and other favourite places. Completed cards were written to include personal messages and interests.

This exchange between the two urban centers also supported a real dialogue, allowing students to share their stories, anxieties, and thoughts about what it means to live somewhere often defined as a non-place by residents from larger and more historic metropolitan areas. Importantly by encouraging dialogue with

International partners, students and the communities learned how their own urban development is similar to others elsewhere.

### So why a postcard project?

The collective exhibition of postcards documents what is best about these cities in the words of its young residents. The postcard itself is an easily recognizable form to carry these messages – with picturesque view on the front and text on the back.

The medium of the postcard further shapes how we show our landscape and ‘ourselves’ regardless of where we live in a very tangible way. For instance, the handmade postcards readily and neatly represent subjects that are intrinsic to our own ideals of lifestyle; e.g. by illustrating concise scenes from shopping, visiting friends, cars, highways, buildings, food, leisure, etc.

As a historic fact - during the golden age of postcard distribution and printing from 1898 to 1918, North Americans and Europeans sent and collected millions of colourful cards. By 1908 sending and receiving picture postcards was like emailing digital photos across the net. By 1913 more than 968 million postcards were being sent every year in the United States. This output doubled almost every six months and far out numbered the US population by some 6 times.

Postcards served as souvenirs, introduced people to distant geographies, new cultures, changing cityscapes and topography, historical events, became time capsules of postal history, fostered architectural appreciation, stimulated debate on social issues and, of course, kept people in touch with each other.

The original use of the postcard at the turn of the century as a medium for personal correspondence and for cultural exchange, works as a framework for this project. Remarkably in an age of email, the postcard



continues to be a tangible message carrier. The commercial success of Nick Bantock’s Griffin and Sabine postcard book [1991] and other recent coffee table postcard anthologies have re-introduced this medium as a powerful means to tell stories and reflect on our shared past visual histories.

It is such a pervasive form that artists have extended its purpose in an act of visual irony. For instance, American photographer, Stephen Shore created a sequence of 9 colour postcards of Amarillo, Texas. Throughout 1971, Shore placed his banal landscape works into souvenir postcard racks during his travels without notifying store owners of his actions. Whether or not Stephen Shore’s experiment worked and/or the ‘intruder’ postcards were picked up by shop owners or bought by the public is not known. However, Shore’s work visually addressed how the underdog town could be part of our cultural consciousness, not unlike the (Sub)urban Exchange project.

In the exhibitions hosted by the Surrey Art Gallery in Canada and by the East Kilbride Arts Centre in Scotland, viewers could become similarly re-acquainted with their own town centres and can read stories and see images which define and reclaim their towns and communities. On a more universal level, the postcard format offers readers an intimate way to reflect on what has been written and supports our age old fascination about a sense of place, as well as our interest in valuing what others have expressed.

For those guests visiting the exhibition, we trust you have enjoyed the cards from East Kilbride, Scotland and Surrey, Canada - As the age old phrase exclaims - ‘Wish you were here!’

We also hope that you won’t now need a reason to send a postcard – and we hope that by creating a postcard of your own might be reason enough.

Sylvia Grace Borda,  
Project Artist





**POSTCARD**

East Kilbride is a great place for shopping and spending your time. There are loads of shops - almost as many as Glasgow - and restaurants + cafes. There is also a great cinema, swimming pool + a great gym!

in the Westwood area of the town are named after places in Canada. For example 'Vancouver drive'!

Amy McGregor  
X

Some Streets

(Sub)urban Exchange: EastKilbride.uk <> Surrey.ca  
A postcard exchange between youth photographers from Surrey, Canada and East Kilbride, Scotland.  
August 18 - December 9, 2007 at the Surrey Art Gallery




Photo Taken June 2007

There are over 30 parks just in Whalley. For example there is Bear Creek Park, Whalley Athletic Park, Green Timbers Urban Forest, Brookside Park, and there are many more! It is great to have so many parks to play a game of soccer or baseball or to go for a walk and explore.

Samantha Webb and Laura Tymoschuk

Grade 12 Photography

"City of Parks"

(Sub)urban Exchange: EastKilbride.uk <> Surrey.ca  
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**POSTCARD**

Dear every one,  
It's me again, Anna. The roads in Ek are very safe. we have lolly Popladies and men. The environment is great. we have brilliant vilds (foxes, Slog, Ash, Deer) we are nothing like Glasgow - the closest city and our neighbour, at all.

Signed  
A laurie.

BY AIR MAIL  
par avion

(Sub)urban Exchange: EastKilbride.uk <> Surrey.ca  
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Photo Taken June 2007

This picture shows how Whalley is multi-cultural and with new building and businesses comes more opportunities for people of all sorts of race and beliefs.

Alex Berry, Steven Scott, Mike Krugel

Grade 12 Photography

"Culture Crazy"

(Sub)urban Exchange: EastKilbride.uk <> Surrey.ca  
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### Focus on the Whalley Town Centre

The Whalley District photographed by junior and senior students of Enver Creek Secondary gives added significance to this place, its nature, view, and scenery and can radiate out into any number of meanings from a nostalgic and popular vista, to a complex social construction of a produced space.

Students were to photograph Whalley from outside perspectives finding connections between land and people and what people do there. They were to walk, drive and look at any area of Whalley, then gather images of – surfaces, buildings, people and objects capturing the pictorial or the picturesque, keeping in mind, that some of their images will be preserved in a postcard. Photographing Whalley was initiated as a collaboration with Sylvia Grace Borda, artist in residence in East Kilbride, Scotland who has been engaging students to archive and document that suburb, a location that, like Whalley, is undergoing a similar transformation of rapid suburban development. This project was included in the curriculum of a Photo Design 12 course that I had written for the district of Surrey. It was also incorporated into the content of an Information Communication Technology course I was teaching at the time thus involving 50+ grade eight students to also photograph Whalley.



Students touring Fred Herzog exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Many of the students were introduced to the concept of archiving a place by first viewing the Herzog exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery (“VAG”), an exhibition of photographs documenting parts of Vancouver in the 50’s and 60’s. This photographic exhibition was fine art photography showing images of people, buildings and street life of Vancouver which have changed significantly as we view these same locations today. This show at the VAG was a jumping point for many students, helping them to grasp the concept of photographing a specific place at a particular time.

As they photographed images of their choosing they have captured Whalley in its moment of transition. The vision of Whalley’s future is to be bigger than downtown Vancouver with skytrain links throughout Surrey and Langley. These students were archiving Whalley’s unique characteristics from lived experience, its nature, culture and history that shapes its landscape and place before these big changes take place.

These students worked independently and/or in small groups to photograph their digital images. Their body of work communicates an understanding of, or



View of 88 Avenue, west of the Surrey Arts Centre, photograph courtesy of Samantha Webb and Laura Tymoschuk

response to (thoughts, feelings and ideas) associated with what they witnessed and what they investigated. Each time a student would photograph the streets they walked they ultimately changed their relationship to them. Some students commented on their initial fears of the unknown and the challenges of not being intrusive, to expressing excitement at discovering things they did not know about. One student described her impressions of Whalley through the eyes of her father who accompanied her to areas that were a part of her father’s childhood. A number of students said they captured the “wildlife” on one street of the so-called drug culture and homeless. So some of these images are archiving the student’s parent’s memories while others are documenting the variance of street life today.

This image gathering experience of photography production will prepare these students to orient their work for presentation and/or exhibition. This process enables the students to find meaning in their work that extends to their community and to their own history in the making. The significance of their efforts may not be perceived by them for years to come but as we witness the intended changes to Whalley their images over time will constitute a body of work that archives a place that has been radically altered.

Laura Hackett,  
 Enver Creek Secondary School



Skytrain Station, photograph courtesy of Rose Lee mason (detail)



Skytrain Station, photograph courtesy of Rose Lee mason (detail)

### (Sub)urban Exchange: EastKilbride.uk <> Surrey.ca

This publication documents the exhibition at the Surrey Art Gallery from August 18 to December 9, 2007. The involvement of Enver Creek Secondary school students is sponsored by the Surrey Art Gallery, with support from the City of Surrey, Surrey School District, BC Arts Council, and Canada Council for the Arts. Sponsorship for Canadian artist Sylvia Grace Borda and her involvement with schools in East Kilbride, Scotland is made possible with funding from South Lanarkshire Council and the East Kilbride Arts Centre, and has been supported by South Lanarkshire Education. The project was initiated in Scotland to commemorate East Kilbride's 60th Anniversary celebrations, and a parallel exchange exhibition was presented at the East Kilbride Arts Centre in the Fall of 2007.

### (Sub)urban Exchange Production Team in Surrey:

Sylvia Grace Borda, Project Artist  
Laura Hackett, Teacher, Visual Arts, Enver Creek Secondary  
Liane Davison, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections  
Brian Foreman, Assistant Curator  
Christopher Dean, Preparator  
Thoralea Pilton, Summer Intern Student

### A Special Thanks to the Students of Enver Creek Secondary School:

#### Senior Students:

Amardeep Athwal, Brandi Ausma, Manraj Bains, Alex Berry, Sahipreet Bhangu, Sharon Dhillon, Janessa Ekman, Christina Gilbert, Gurneet Gill, Harpreet Gill, TJ Grewal, Justine Johal, Kayla Johnson, Mike Krugel, Aman Kumar, Bella Marshall, Rose Lee Mason, Lynda Nguyen, Meghan Nilsson, Michelle Nishino, Rinku Panesar, Kylla Patterson, Thoralea Pilton, Sarah Pope, Sandip Purewal, Shawnam Rattan, Sabrina Sahota, Steven Scott, Tracy Scragg, Alisha Shafique, Laura Tymoschuk, Jess Warn, Samantha Webb

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