



# STATION

Michael D. McCormack

ARTsPLACE GALLERY, ANNAPOLIS ROYAL, NS



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Michael D. McCormack

Essay by Kate Walchuk

An exhibition at ARTsPLACE Gallery.

An Installation at Fort Anne National  
Historic Site of Canada.

June 12 - July 12, 2015

Annapolis Region Community Arts Council and  
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## **Artist's Introduction**

Michael D. McCormack

STATION converges archival audio and visual material of twentieth century radio and communicative media with an immersive media installation inspired by first-hand experiences of Amateur Radio and DEW Line Operators as remote-sensors of our broader collective consciousness.

Over the past three years, I have worked collaboratively with Amateur Radio Clubs and individuals throughout Atlantic Canada, developing a body of work drawing on the experiential elements of acute, first-hand radio listening, and how it has played a role in our understanding of contemporary communications practices. STATION unravels our relationship with dense peripheral media aesthetics to further consider our conditioned state of social interactivity.

This project has taken on many formations both as gallery and site responsive installations, and in all cases explores the boundaries of radio within each space. I am thrilled to have the opportunity for the first time to show this work both in the gallery and off-site at ARTsPLACE and at Fort Anne National Historic Site, both in Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia.

## **On STATION**

Kate Walchuk

Perched above the shore of the Annapolis River is Canada's oldest National Historic Site, Fort Anne. Built to protect the harbour of Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia, it remains a symbol of early European colonization and looks roughly the same today as it did in the 18th century. But if you looked to Fort Anne on the night of June 12, 2015, it would have appeared very differently: bright lights illuminating every window, rhythmically flicking on and off like a lighthouse signal and the intermittent sound of bellowing fog horns navigating us across the Fort's dark grounds, a glowing beacon calling us to it in the dark. This one-night installation was the precursor to the most recent iteration of Michael D. McCormack's ongoing multimedia project, STATION.

McCormack deftly employs the multiple meanings of his project title, STATION, referring to radio transmissions, military defense stationing and the placement of nomadic Inuit communities into stationary suburbs as a result of Cold War-era infrastructure. Beginning in 1953, the US Airforce and Canadian government partnered to develop a wide system of radar stations in the far northern Arctic region for the purpose of detecting potential Soviet invasions. The Distant Early Warning Line, or DEW Line, was the northernmost of this

infrastructure - effectively a dotted line of stations stretching from Alaska to Iceland. As Cold War paranoia compounded the perceived need to build quickly, the entire DEW Line project was constructed in less than three years, with much of the work occurring in darkness and sub-zero temperatures at a breakneck pace. It is difficult to imagine the immediate and vast impact that the DEW Line project had on the remote Arctic landscape; almost instantly, tens of thousands of workers arrived to build antennas, weather stations, airplane hangars and prefabricated Quonset huts, eventually tainting much of the soil with toxic pollutants. In stark contrast to its hurried construction, the environmental remediation of chemically contaminated soils at DEW Line sites has taken decades. In the end, the colonization of the northern landscape was the most significant outcome of the DEW Line project. The sudden introduction of infrastructure, fuel, housing, medical facilities and employment opportunities resulted in the stationing of communities that once thrived nomadically.

These tensions are palpable in McCormack's installation. In one section of the gallery, halved oil barrels are arranged to mimic Quonset huts. The barrels emanate sounds from a rhythmic radio transmission, which oscillates from soft sonar-like tones to sharp sirens. As the volume increases, the huts cast a bright semicircle of warm light onto the gallery walls, somewhere between the



effect of a searchlight and the midnight sun. Experiencing the exhibition, it is possible to become aware of one's implication in this landscape, as the movement of bodies in the space creates interference with the radio signal.

A replica Stevenson screen weather station, used to shelter weather instruments from the extreme northern climate, stands in another corner of the gallery, emitting a flickering, cold light. The source of this light is revealed through the structure's slatted louvres: a screen of rapidly changing photographic images. These are over 600 personal photographs taken by McCormack's grandfather, Berton Cosman, while he worked as a Telecommunications Engineer and short wave radio operator for the DEW Line in the Yukon. Although it is possible to make out certain portions of the images, the installation leaves us considering the translation of this pictorial archive into pure light and rhythmic frequency. Listening closely, one will notice that the frequencies of both light and sound are always shifting slightly, almost imperceptibly, continually setting and re-setting a pace in the gallery. Together, the works in STATION demand the same acute perception and attentiveness exercised by the short wave radio operator waiting for a signal, experiencing the cognitive push and pull between hyper-aware, focused listening and the numbing expansiveness of the peripheral atmosphere.









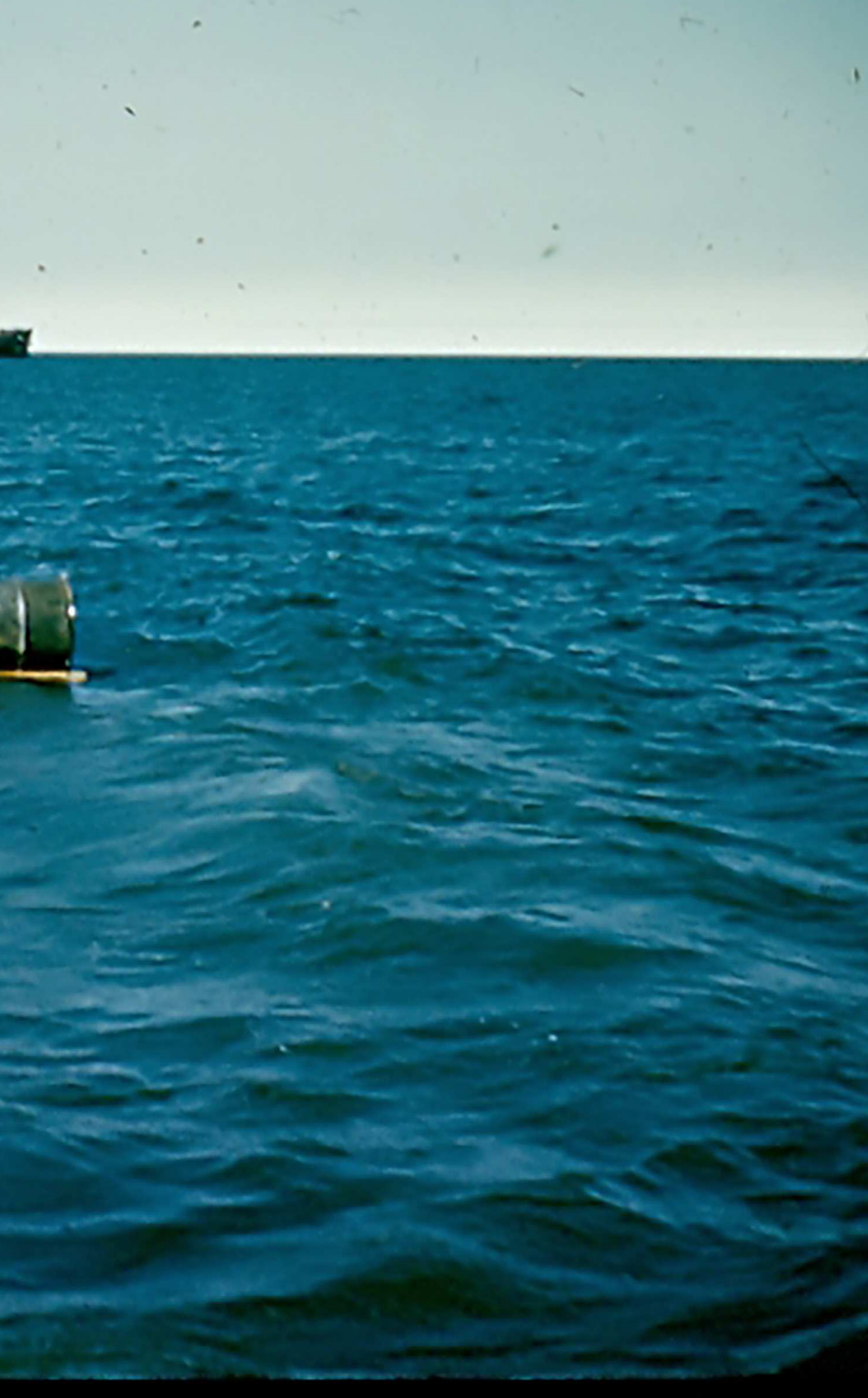








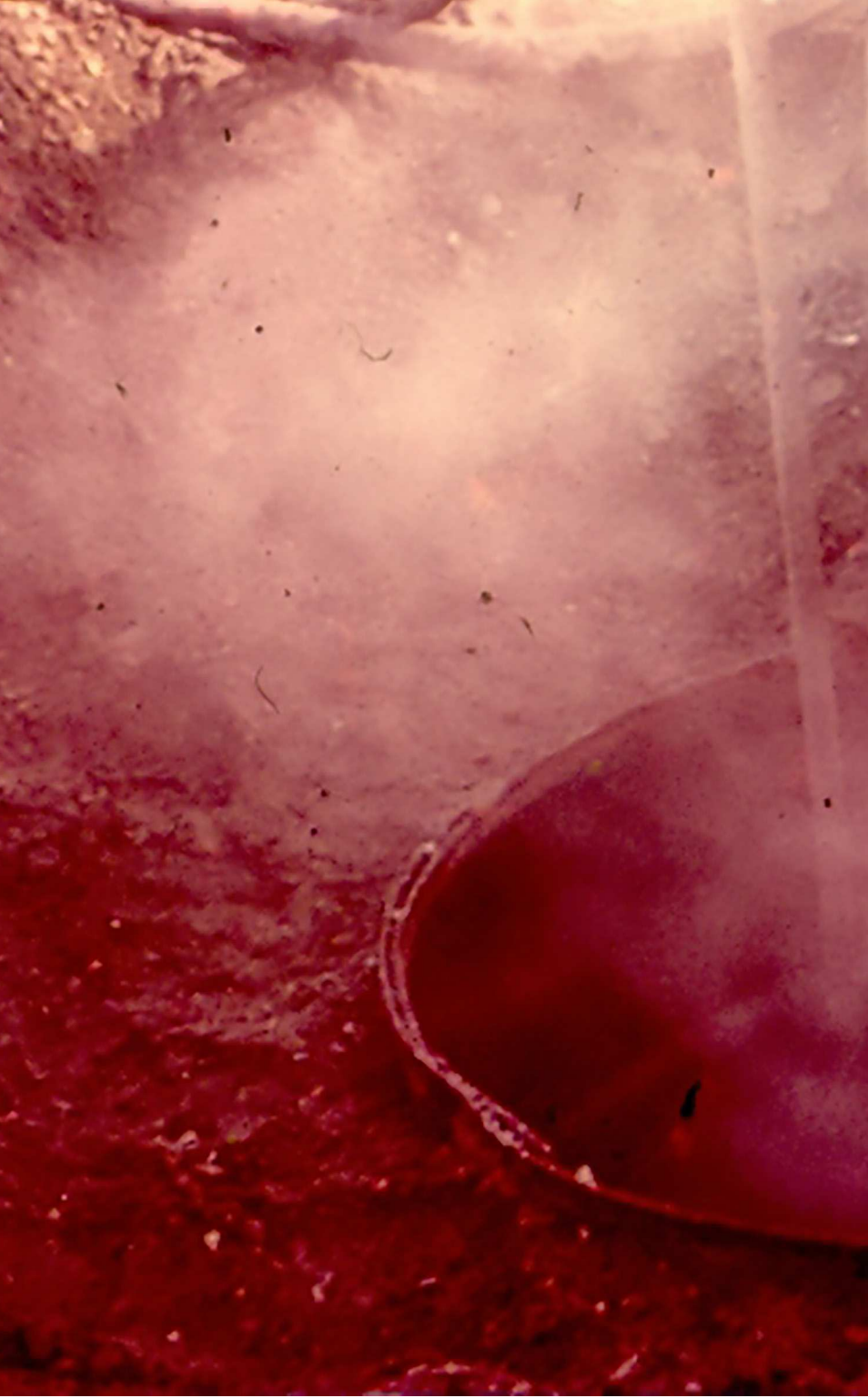


















## Biographies

**Michael D. McCormack** is an interdisciplinary artist from Halifax, NS. He was the founder and custodian of the McCleave Gallery of Fine Art from 2002 until the suitcase gallery merged with the Suitcase Art Gallery Space Research Institute (SAGSRI) in 2007. From 2009-2013 he worked as Director of Eyelevel Gallery and representative for the Association of Artist-run Centres from the Atlantic. He has curated and exhibited works throughout Canada, the Netherlands, Australia, Ireland, and Cuba. Michael recently completed his MFA at NSCAD University where he completed his two most recent works, BEACON and STATION.

[www.michaeldmccormack.com](http://www.michaeldmccormack.com)

**Kate Walchuk** is an artist and DJ living in Dartmouth, NS. She is currently the Exhibitions Coordinator at the Anna Leonowens Gallery at NSCAD University.

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## Acknowledgements

Cover Image: STATION installation at Anna Leonowen's Gallery, Halifax, NS, March 9-21, 2015.

Photo: courtesy of the artist

All remaining images taken on 35mm slide by B.W. Cosman while working on the DEW Line in 1953.

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