PETER GAZENDAM
A Long Conversation
(for Oona)

PUBLIC
ART
vancouver

About the Work

Space is finite, but time is porous. Only a given number of people and processes can occupy a space at a given moment, but any number of things can happen over time. A process built on the principle of dispersal over time can allow for the unfolding of many more possibilities than one that seeks to cram as many things as possible into a single space.[1]

In this quote from "Earthworms Dancing: Notes for a Biennial in Slow Motion," Raqs Media Collective breaks the bond between 'here' and 'now' to open up a capacious possibility. They use the figure of an earthworm to propose an alternative to the insatiable consumer of our era, suggesting instead that we, like them, might spend our time creating a fertile environment for the future. Earthworms are famous composters, but Pacific Banana Slugs are also impressive detritivores, leaving rich humus in their wake. Their work takes a stately pace, about six inches per minute, and in dry conditions, is lubricated through slimy excretions. But it would be an error to regard *Ariolimax columbianus* purely in terms of its labour. In environments that properly support slugs, only a quarter of them are engaged in eating, reproducing or evading predators at any one time. The rest of the time, presumably, they play. According to scientist, Aliette Frank,

the time devoted to play and 'connectivity' indicates community vitality.[2]

A Long Conversation (for Oona) disperses cast bronze slugs across the Terminal Avenue site. A mere one hundred years ago, it lay beneath the water, and was surrounded by an estuary hemmed by rich rainforest. The mastication of slugs and other decomposers laid the foundation for the monumental fir, hemlock and spruce that once shaded all of Senákw, as this place was known for three millennia.

Bronze—the material that honours heroic men and beasts in traditional sculpture—here celebrates the humble slug. Depicted in classic slug poses—solidly pondering, resting with antennæ withdrawn, curious in oblique curls—the forty sculptures range from tiny to monstrous. The two largest face off across the line between Columbia College and the adjacent office building: is it courtship they negotiate, or territorial detente? Like paired lions that flank bridges and entrances in colonial heraldry, they are alert and on guard. Yet they have turned to face one another, thirty-six inches (or six minutes) apart. Is their exchange a matter of survival or *joie de vivre*? Their kin—the little ones climbing columns, sheltered by benches or exploring pathways—seek attention from the fast-moving public, enticing pedestrians to break pace, inviting curiosity, attraction and/or repulsion. Should a vital community be generated here, should time be made to dilate, how many are the ways connection might unfold? This is the conversation's opening line.

— Lorna Brown

An artist, curator and writer, **Lorna Brown** is the Associate Director/Curator of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery.

[1] Raqs Media Collective, "Earthworms Dancing: Notes for a Biennial in Slow Motion," *e-flux* #7—June–August 2009, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/07/61387/earthworms-dancing-notes-for-a-biennial-in-slow-motion/, accessed May 10, 2017.

[2] Frank, Aliette, "A Thriving Community of Banana Slugs," Scientist at Work: Notes From the Field, *New York Times*, March 28, 2012: https://scientistatwork.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/28/a-thriving-community-of-banana-slugs/?_r=0 , accessed May 10, 2017.

Images Installation views of *A Long Conversation (for Oona)*, 2017.
Photos: Blaine Campbell

About the Artist

Peter Gazendam, based in Vancouver, uses sculpture, photography, video, installation and sound to explore how these very media communicate through time. In *The Revelator* (2007), Gazendam used found tourist photographs of the first atomic bomb test site in New Mexico to construct a temporary museum and imagined monument to this epic event. Taking the long view also featured in *A Saloon Keeper, A Newspaper, Two Wars and A Doorman* (2010), a satire in which the artist imagines a future that has forgotten its own material and cultural past. Histories—both personal and public—are proposed as subjective, often intentionally forgotten and only partially seen, perpetually in the process of being transformed and reimagined. Since 2002, Gazendam has presented his work at galleries in Vancouver, Victoria, Halifax, Stockholm, Philadelphia, Guelph and Toronto. His projects for print include *C* and *Setup* magazines, and his sound works include "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," on the Mercersound CD, for the 51st Venice Biennale.

Above Peter Gazendam, still from the four channel video *You, You, You, You, You, You, You* (2016)

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