



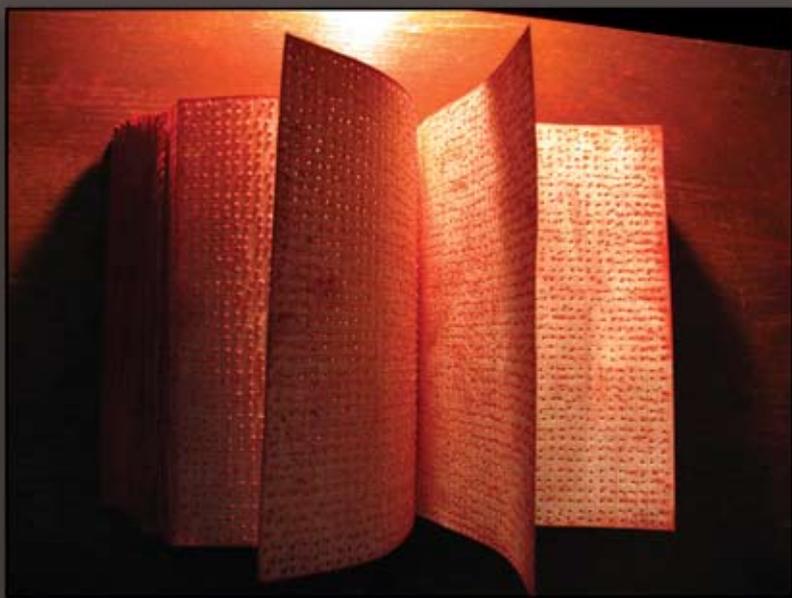
**Vessna Perunovich**  
*Borderless*

April 4<sup>th</sup> - May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
Reception: Friday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 8pm

Note...

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THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE



*Soul Searching, 2006*



## SMALL UTOPIAS

by *Andrew King*

Notions in and around exile have, more than any other force, driven twentieth century cultural identity. Displacement, contingency, the interstitial and the transitory condition are now seen as valid states of being: the stasis of non-stasis. Around this condition cities have been built, countries formed, manifestos written, philosophies defined, murders committed and, of course, art has been made.

The diaspora and its commentators are varied and rich: Wim Wenders, Breyton Breytonback, Helene Cixous, Alfred Doblin, Edward Said, Jonathan Raban, etc. The most concise and nuanced commentator, Walter Benjamin, died in the act of exiling himself from an already displaced condition, simultaneously undermining and succumbing to his exile. Perhaps the most tragic result of this contemporary human and political condition has been the almost complete destruction of the utopian ideal.



This is the point where Vessna Perunovich has situated herself. Perunovich seems to have decided that small utopias are better than none at all, and these small utopias exist within the act of art making. Heavily influenced by her experiences of exclusion as an immigrant from the former Yugoslavia, her practice is intensely autobiographical. An artist immersed in a state of exile, she works with intelligence, skill and sensitivity to act on this condition in a way that, like Benjamin, simultaneously undermines and celebrates it.

Like the artist herself, Perunovich's work continually moves across real and metaphorical borders, challenging ideological, social, and material constructs in varied and powerful contexts. Motivated by "the desire to speak on behalf of exiles everywhere for which exclusion results in their silence", she covers complex territory that precludes notions of a singular discipline. The critical construct of exile demands much from the author, and those demands cannot

be satisfied through one methodology. Perunovich uses two dimensional works, video, performance and large-scale installations to articulate her ideas, and even this virtuosity cannot fully contain the breadth of her subject and the ambition of her thought.

The Stride Gallery show, *Borderless*, is no exception. The central piece in the exhibition, *Currency*, amasses a ubiquitous material (rubber bands) and transforms them into an architecturally scaled insertion into the gallery. The smaller, artifact-based *Soul Searching* involves the viewer at an intimate and deeply moving scale. And, finally, the video piece *Infinite Wall* acts as an essay on the architecture of exile. All these pieces simultaneously engage the viewer in different ways while evidencing broader questions on the viewer's position both in the gallery and as a citizen.

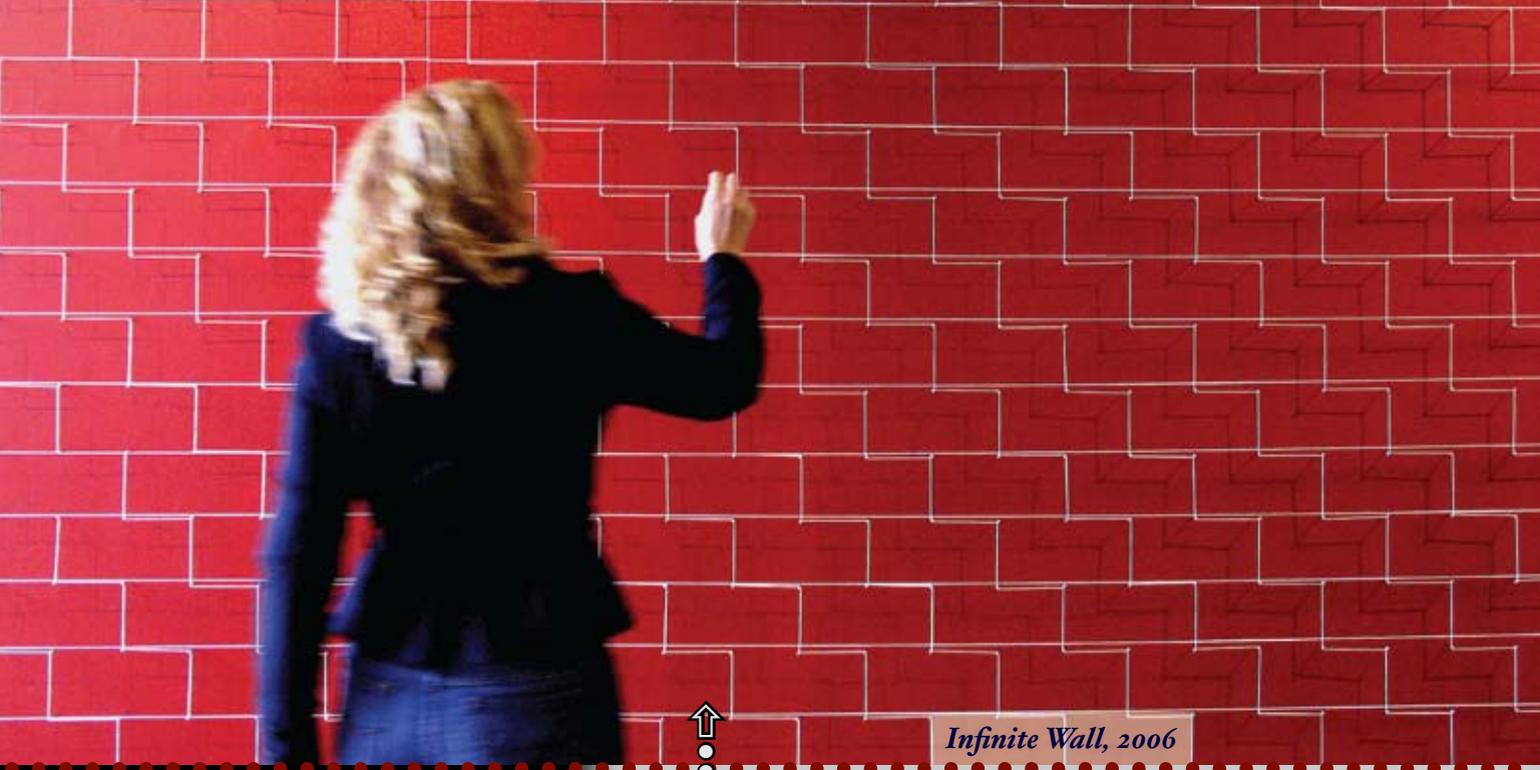


### Artist Biography:

*Vessna Perunovich* is a Toronto based visual artist who works in a variety of media ranging from sculpture and painting to video installation and performance. Recently her work was shown at the 8th Havana Biennial in Havana Cuba, the Second Tirana Biennial in Tirana Albania, the XII International Art Biennial of Cerveira in Portugal, the IV Cetinje Biennial in Yugoslavia, the VI Vrsac Biennial in Serbia & Montenegro, and at the ARTiade 2004 in Athens, Greece. Her ongoing traveling performance project *Transitory Places* was performed at the Tate Modern grounds in London, England, at Tower of Belem in Lisbon, Portugal, at Malacon in Havana, Cuba and at Ponte de Academia, Italy- as an off-site project during the 50th Venice Biennial.

### Writer Biography:

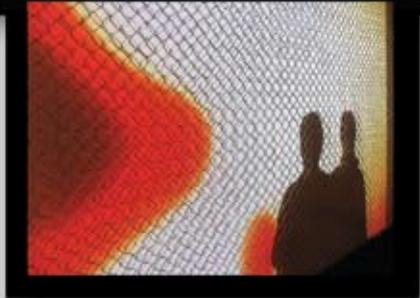
*Andrew King* is an inter-disciplinary practitioner, working within architecture, art and criticism. He was the recipient of the Canada Council for the Arts 2003-2004 Prix de Rome and a Canadian Architect Award of Excellence. He has had his work and critical essays published in several national and international art and architecture journals, including *Canadian Architect* and *Canadian Art* and he was selected as one of Canada's design leaders by the *Globe and Mail*.



*Infinite Wall, 2006*



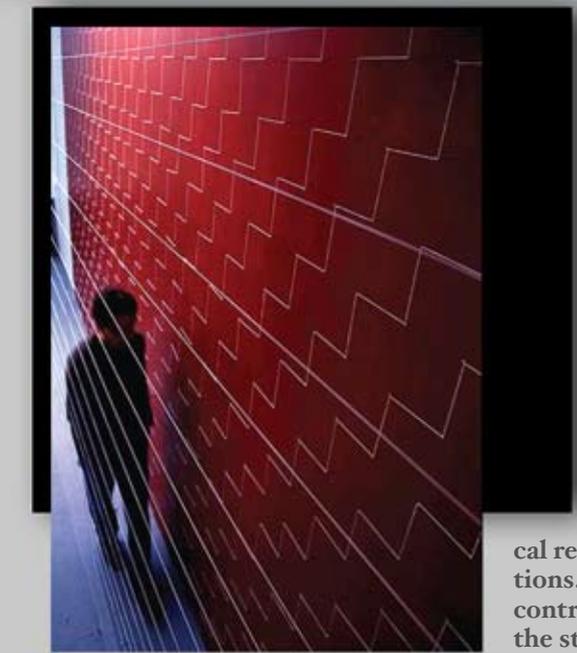
*Currency, 2004*



Perunovich's current work grapples with critical ideas using surprisingly succinct and reduced material strategies. Elasticity is primary—metaphorically and physically—to the power of the work. Her small utopias are the moments in which this elasticity reaches its stasis, and the body rests, momentarily, in a careful balance.

This work refers to a time when art's ideological position had less to do with the 'individual' and more to do with an ideological 'condition.' It is an art devoid of self reference, of pop culture riffs, of art commentary. It is not 'of art;' it is well beyond art. Perunovich has embraced the scale and import of her questions. These are not musings on the banal or mundane, or exaggerated expansions of seemingly inconsequential moments. These are moments of extreme consequence, gathered and intensified.

The resulting work is thus a concentration of something larger than our individual concerns as artists and citizens. Perunovich compresses these broad critical conditions into powerful and complete visceral moments within the gallery space. In fact, the gallery seems inadequate for these moments. The work is constantly challenging the exhibition space as too puny, too contrived, too conceptually, critically and existentially small for these ideas. The work demands broader contexts, at the scale of cities, where notions of exile go beyond compositional essays and become intensified moments of exile itself.



*Infinite Wall, 2006*

Perunovich's performance series *Transitory Places* is perhaps the most appropriate example of the scale problem implicit in her work. By inserting a composition of her body and a singular fabric 'garment' into the city itself, this series of performances in powerful and loaded urban environments puts into stark relief the limitations of singular curated spaces in containing art with such an ambitious agenda. Each piece seems to find not only the careful physical balance between body and fabric, but also a compositional balance that embodies a broader contextual situation: a sea wall in Havana, a bridge in Venice, the Tower of Bellem. It says much that the work is powerful enough not only to exist in these contexts, but to add meaning to them.

It is here that the work moves into the architectural, but in a way that mere architecture could never achieve. The use of the body (usually hers), a context (usually loaded), and a singular, resonant material articulates the tensions between constructed space and the individual. Exile is expressed not as an abstract existential condition, but as a poetic and demanding physical reality. The cities, like galleries, deflate in the face of Perunovich's reduced actions. There is a certainty, a clarity and a succinctness that question something as contrived as the city-state, as citizenship, as identity beyond anything more than the struggle of being. We understand with certainty that her body and the tension of the material will eventually bring the city down.

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# ●●● STRIDE

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## STRIDE GALLERY

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Gallery hours: 11 AM - 5 PM, Tuesday - Saturday  
Admission is free and everyone is welcome.

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