



**2001  
ANNUAL  
MEETING**

KURAS & MACKENZIE  
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March 17 - April 27, 2019



## Christian Kuras and Duncan MacKenzie in conversation with Claudine Isé

**Claudine Isé:** The exhibition is titled “2001 Annual Meeting.” What are the ideas behind this title?

**Christian Kuras:** Right, so for me anyway—because you’ll find that Duncan and I don’t base our collaboration on agreeing about things—we’re definitely two very independent-minded parties who have come together to work. There’s no “Corporation of Kuras MacKenzie.” So at least as far as I’m concerned, the title makes me laugh because you can’t have an annual meeting that’s labeled 2001. That’s a one-off meeting. It also refers to the year 2001, which is this strange year that seems kind of futuristic but it’s also a really long time ago now. Also, an annual meeting is so prosaic, and there’s something just really disappointing about it being the New Millennium and you’ve got an annual meeting. The themes of the show for me center around nostalgia and ideas about home and shifts in values. So the title is just a kind of playful pointing at some of those ideas.

**Duncan MacKenzie:** Yeah, I think that’s right. It ties into that kind of nostalgia for the Millennium in a kind of dumb romantic way. And then I also like that there’s a reference to when Christian and I get together and work in the same studio—this sort of impulse towards an annual meeting, which is somehow less than annual.

**Christian:** I mentioned corporation before. It’s funny, because when you collaborate there is this kind of tension between the individual intuitive impetus that drives you towards ideas, and our needing to have some kind of process in place to manage how that works between two authors. You can get quite business-y about it, and have spreadsheets and calendars and charts, but at the end of the day, we’re only using those tools to effectively do something that’s quite chaotic and quite personal.

**Claudine:** I definitely want to circle back and talk more about collaboration and tension. But first I want to ground us a little bit more in how you make your work. You are collaborators who often have very different points of view on your projects. You also live in different countries. How does the conceptualizing and then the actual making of the objects happen?

**Duncan:** I think that it’s different for each thing. Each of us touches everything at some point, but there’s no consistent formulation to it. It’s more like: we have an idea, we discuss the idea eight million different ways, then we decide to do the idea, and then it changes three or four more times before it actually gets rendered out as an object or an image or a thing. So there’s a portion of it that’s kind of design process-y, where we discuss a whole bunch of ideas and philosophical formulations and then we discuss how it should work, and then if everything works right, we manage to strip out a lot of the “design” by the time the thing is finished.

**Christian:** We’ve been doing this a long time, and over the years we did play around with different ways of working, especially when there were longer periods where we couldn’t see each other. How do you keep a studio practice going effectively during that time, using tools which kind of force you into a quite digital design-y space? We realized that a lot of the most magical moments that happen with the pieces were when we ended up, like, breaking the stuff. We might have planned something and made it and executed it at a residency or whatever, but it was when we got together and scrapped that initial design—as Duncan called it, the ‘design-y’ element of the plan—and just worked together in the studio just messing about, that was what seemed to give us the most interesting pieces.

**Claudine:** Can you talk about some of the pieces you’re planning?

**Duncan:** I want to answer that question in a bit of a roundabout way, which is to say that for us most of the work that is in the show comes out of a sort of twinned relationship between nostalgia and landscape. Half of the work is about a nostalgia for the landscape, and the other is a lament for the solidity of certain ideas, or many abstract ideas really, and a lot of ideas about our relationship to the social contract, our relationship to our government, our relationship to the things that we were promised as citizens and how we need to explain or articulate those things to ourselves at this point. I feel like, you know, it’s easy to kind of enumerate the bits and pieces that are getting worked on. It’s hard to know what will actually end up being the thing that’s installed. So for example, we’re working on a series of 36 etchings that are predicated on the work we did when we put out the *Diagrams* book with Green Lantern Press, but these are also informed by Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* in Siena’s Palazzo Pubblico. They use the concepts that Lorenzetti articulates in *Allegory of Good Government* around justice for instance, or loyalty or order.

**Christian:** Another of the pieces is part of a larger project around creating a set of 28-year calendars. The reason for 28 years is because that’s the number of years after which you can start to cycle. After 28 years you can go back to the first calendar in that cycle 28 years ago, and use it in the 29th year and all the days will match up. So all you ever need is 28 calendars and you’re set for life. We really love that idea of being able to like, have this container in time and not need to go outside it. I remember as a kid one of my dad’s friends was really cheap, and he would say, really proudly, “Look, I don’t need to buy new calendars—I have all these old calendars!” He felt like he was really giving it to the man because you know, he’d figured out how to hack the system.

**Duncan:** Fucking calendar man. Yeah.

**Christian:** But I always thought it was so interesting because, you know, I’d go into his basement and there would be this calendar from 1967 and it was like, 1992, and sure enough it worked, but you know, you’d have his sister’s 12th birthday marked on there and she’s 32 now. It was this weird relationship towards time.

**Claudine:** Can you both talk a bit more about nostalgia—what it means to you in your practice and in this particular show?

**Duncan:** Part of it comes out of us coming to terms with the fact that we’re never going to go home. We grew up in Calgary, Alberta. And we’ve talked a lot about, “Oh, isn’t Canada great. It’s nice and pleasant and Humans are kind there.” We have all these latent positive feelings for it. And then when we’re there we’re like, “so, you ever gonna go back?” “No, fuck no, not gonna go back and live there.” It’s not that we don’t love it—we truly love our time there, but for us it’s no longer that space it used to be. The thing that it is now is just different and it doesn’t feel quite like home anymore. It was interesting to think that it hasn’t changed that much, on the other hand we’ve changed so much that we’re nostalgic about this place that still exists. That kind of talking about those vestiges led to us thinking about all these other things that we are nostalgic for.



**Christian:** To me, what Duncan said about we’ll never go home has a kind of wider resonance than we’ll not go back to Calgary, because I don’t think I’ve thought of Calgary as home. I had a strange relationship to it anyway. But it’s that larger notion that none of us will ever go home. The thing that we left behind whenever we formed our view of there being a solid, consistent world that made sense, that we all had to leave behind at some point as we got further and further into being adults and realizing that the world has always been about shifts and changes and rupture. It has never actually been the kind of stable place that we all had to think it was, just functionally, in order not to go insane growing up in it. It is something that you as an adult don’t ever stop dealing with, just like you never quite stop dealing with grief, you know, if you’ve had that put upon you. You never stop dealing with that kind of distance between you and, not just where you’ve been physically, but the kind of world that you inhabited until you realized that it was more complicated and there were many worlds, and there’s no such thing as a return in that sense.

I think that also expands out into the relationship that we have with the cultural moment we’re in. That process, that realization, I feel it being expressed in the kind of societal turn that is occurring at the moment. Having said that, that might be because it’s something I’m thinking about and I’m projecting it onto society and maybe it’s always been a churn of this process happening. But there’s certainly a moment right now where the sort of institutions that were the, you know, Eurocentric, post-Enlightenment institutions that were the foundation for much of civilization and civility in the West are really being contested. So I think there’s also this kind of nostalgia that exists. It’s a two-fold nostalgia; on the one hand, the forces that want to question the stability are employing nostalgia for something that never was, but also I think it’s felt by anyone who enjoyed the benefits of the kind of stability that we’ve had, relatively, in a small pocket of the world—much at the cost of other parts of the world. The kind of weird guilty complicit nostalgia that we feel towards that stability, now that we know that it was never really stable, and that it was always bought for a very high price.

**Claudine:** I have one more question that is kind of romantic I suppose. Why has collaboration, and collaboration with one another in particular, remained important to you both, especially because you have to do it long distance?

**Christian:** Um, safety in numbers? I’m joking.

**Duncan:** I mean my answer is sort of simple and dumb. I think I just like it. I feel like it doesn’t stop being rewarding and it doesn’t stop being interesting. Sometimes when I have an idea of my own, and I’m sort of slamming it around, I’ll kind of tap out on it at some point and I realize, I’m overthinking that thing, and it sort of is a kind of refresh in the partnership. Those ideas maybe get tapped out and then they come back in funny ways that were never going to be possible if I was by myself. That kind of prompting and the tension of sort of having to push and pull ideas, the exploration you can do with an idea in dialogue is just very different than you can do all by yourself. I don’t know. The answer is, I like it. I mean Christian probably doesn’t, but that’s my opinion.

**Christian:** No, I hate it deeply, but it makes sense for me conceptually. I remember when I was 20 or something and read Roland Barthes’ essay “The Death of the Author.” That hit me really hard, and ever since, there’s been something in my brain that resists investigating artist biography. I just want to encounter the work. I don’t want too much of a framing narrative. I just want to be with the work and feel what’s transmitted through it. I remember thinking that if the author is dead then the idea of there being two authors should be no different than there being one. But at the same time it does. There’s a kind of weird energy that creeps into the work because it’s got these really different intents that are trying to resolve around each other in some way. Ultimately, I like it too. It’s like you can sing alone but when you harmonize with someone else, it creates this whole other level of sound experience. You know, after a couple of years we look at old pieces and I don’t remember who did what and it doesn’t matter. It makes no difference. All I know is that it’s got this weird quality to it that couldn’t have come from either of our studios individually.

**Duncan:** I, on the other hand, am keeping a spreadsheet of what you’ve done and what I’ve done.

*Kuras & MacKenzie is a collaboration between Christian Kuras and Duncan MacKenzie. Kuras is an Information Architect for the BBC and a painter trained at the University of Calgary, Emily Carr University, the Glasgow School of Art, and Concordia University. MacKenzie is the Chair of Art and Art History at Columbia College Chicago, the managing Founder at Bad at Sports (badatsports.com), and a former partner at the designer toy company Citizen Brick. He was trained at the University of Calgary, the University of Western Sydney, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. They live in Manchester and Chicago, respectively, and have been producing artworks together since 2004. Their work has been exhibited across North America and Europe and written about in Art in America, the Chicago Tribune, Artforum, and Afterall Magazine. Their taste is very different. Kuras reads long, slow, rich novels, while MacKenzie prefers short documents unencumbered by affectual texture and nuanced meandering. They agree that post Misfits, Danzig only produced two note-worthy songs. Just saying.*

**G** OLDFINCH

319 N Albany  
Chicago, IL 60612 | goldfinchgallery.org  
info@goldfinchgallery.org  
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