



Since moving to Toronto in 1975, artist, critic, curator, and activist **Andy Fabo** has influenced the landscape of Canadian visual culture and advanced debates on representation, censorship, and activism. *Studs*, his 1978 exhibition at A Space Gallery in Toronto, was a landmark for Queer art in Canada and established him as an artist unafraid to dive into the polemical, and political, both within his art practice, and in the realm of public discourse.

Fabo's work has been featured in innumerable solo and group exhibitions and publications across Canada, and internationally, including, Canada House in London, the Centre Culturel Canadien de Paris, the Art Museum of the Americas (Washington D.C.), Luhring Augustine Gallery (NYC), the prestigious Wexner Centre, and in Berlin, Wales, the UK, the Netherlands and Zurich. Other highlights include the AGO's recent survey, *Tributes and Territories*, a duo show at the Power Plant in 1992, and in 2005, a mid-career retrospective at the MOCCA. His work has been reviewed in *ArtForum*, and is part of several survey volumes published by Routledge, and Oxford University Press, among others.

In addition to his practice, Fabo remains active as a teacher, guest lecturer, curator, and writer of criticism and exhibition essays. Most notably, Fabo was one of the first Canadian artists to respond to the AIDS pandemic, creating numerous bodies of work that dealt with loss, commemoration, and the body in catastrophic crisis—subjects which he continues to plumb with irrefutable determination and vision today.

Andy Fabo

The Weight of Delirium

Curated by Natalie Olanick and Rhonda Meier

March 5 – April 8, 2020



<https://www.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/art-gallery/>



Warren G. Flowers Art Gallery, Dawson College
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I first met Andy in the mid-eighties in Toronto, when I was studying art and was drawn to the way he approached being an artist. He was engrossed with everyone who was making art, and passionate about the work he was doing. At the time, he was creating figurative paintings that addressed the subject of being a young gay male artist who was questioning positions of authority in art and society. The paintings were expressive, sexy, and at the same time, subversive.

Andy was one of a group of artists who felt excluded from museums and galleries, and were seeking a space of inclusion. The result was the legendary artists' collective ChromaZone. Although it exhibited over 400 artists during five years of operation, ChromaZone began in an apartment on Spadina Avenue—all the walls were painted white, and one of the members (Oliver Girling) lived in the back room. The openings were massive parties where beer was sold to subsidize the space and advertising of the events. At one evening, I remember the shocked comment of an audience member over Andy's paintings of young men wrestling.

Since then, Andy has worked in a variety of media and mediums. Video productions with his partner Michael Balsler during the 1990s and early 2000s produced time-based works that addressed their perspectives on HIV/AIDS and art. They are a poetic mosaic about the danger, fear, and resolution of coping with the virus.

The dynamic of inclusion and diversity continues in Fabo's practice as an artist, teacher, and writer. In his series of large photo-montage scrolls, *Delirious at the Borderlines*, adversity is recorded as a personal encounter. The drawings in the *Weight* series use repetition and subtle nuances of hand rendering to recount tropes of hardship, and at the same time, perseverance. The struggle becomes visible, underpinned by awareness and compassion.

Natalie Olanick, co-curator



Above: Drawing from *The Weight* series, (2016) mixed media on paper, 24" x 32"
 Right: *Delirious Scroll 4* (2013) digital print on watercolour paper, 96" x 36"
 Far Right: *Delirious Scroll 5* (2013) digital print on watercolour paper, 96" x 36"
 Front/Back Cover: Drawings from *The Weight* series, (2016) mixed media on paper



The Weight of Delirium

"I prefer the people who eat off the bare earth the delirium from which they were born."
 — Antonin Artaud

The works in this exhibition, *The Weight of Delirium*, were selected from two different bodies of my art of the last decade: *Delirious at the Borderlines* (2012-13), a series consisting of both drawings and digital prints, and *The Weight* (2016-17), a collection of more than fifty iterative mixed-media drawings.

It seems appropriate to combine the two for this exhibition because both collections of work rely on metaphor and allegory to portray crisis. With the former it was a personal health crisis, while the latter tries to depict an embodied reaction to the dire sociopolitical forces that have evolved globally in the 21st century.

Both bodies of work have an autobiographical element that is typical of my practice, but the *Delirious* series is particularly pointed in this regard. In 1986 my partner, artist Tim Jocelyn, was one of the first Canadian artists to be afflicted with AIDS and died shortly after. I was diagnosed as HIV+ at that time, but did not come down with an AIDS-defining illness until a decade later when I became sick with pneumocystis pneumonia. I was fortunate since by that time a drug regime that impeded the virus had been developed. This set of drawings and prints was a response to a second bout of pneumonia in 2012, which reminded me of the continuing threat of HIV. One of the medications was a steroid which, in high doses, brings on hallucinations, so the drawings and prints in this oeuvre capture the delirium of walking up to the borderline between life and death. Artistically, I responded by creating a body of work that imaged the body in crisis, dealing with the emotional terrain of the AIDS crisis without resorting to the peaked emotional visual strategies of neo-expressionism.

In her book *Hold It Against Me*, Jennifer Doyle grapples with the work of a spectrum of artists who engage viewers on a subjective level that she designates as "affect." Originating in the field of psychology, Affect Theory deals with emotion and mood. Put into an artistic context, the discourse has expanded the term to include a nuanced array of sensation/passion/sentiment/emotion, all of which are more complex and ineffable than simple expression. Looking at divergent artists, Doyle characterizes affect as difficult—often complex and contradictory in response—inherently political, yet not as reductive in its messaging as is much political art. The artists Doyle discusses, aim to be arresting, unnerving, upsetting, and yet aesthetic.

Likewise, this is an aspiration I have with my practice. To make work that is declarative yet not didactic. Using tropes that are engaging, even gripping, but also inexpressible, poetic, and polysemous. I ferret in darkness for images that are impactful even while they create nomadic shifts in meaning, depending on the context and the means of rendering.

Andy Fabo, artist