



**Project
Space**



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**Dana Prieto, *Out of Place Don't Forget To*
September 9 – October 15, 2016**

Landing on this beautiful and prosperous territory, ~~You will discover a new area of interest~~
where settlers occupy, develop and exploit its vast extensions, ~~See reverse side~~
prompt me to ritualize the attempts of reading the poetic and prosaic layers of histories
from an undignified flipside of the urbanscape: its inevitably junked surface. ~~Il n'est
jamais trop tard~~

The process of foraging trash from the Xpace's surrounding streets, ~~acquitté—Canada~~
plays with deviating ways of creating value and threading public and intimate narratives
in these post-industrial, culturally vibrant ~~wild 'n' mild~~
and rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods that graciously triangulate and intersect at the
gallery's location. ~~Quels sont les effets sociaux,~~
While simultaneously encountering, intervening and exchanging corroded matter, I
construct participatory experiences for uncanny stories to emerge through the marginal
remainders that compose garbage. ~~and snowshoes that they needed to travel over snow~~

-Dana Prieto, September 2016

Towards a Poetics of Trash

You can tell a lot about a person from their trash. The intimate details of anyone's life
are indeed found in what's left behind: an old lover's note, scar tissue, the hiding spaces
so good that they're forgotten. Some artists know this all too well, taking arms to history
by destroying their material past (Charles Dickens, Barnett Newman, Agnes Martin
are but few belonging to the historical purging club), others infamously bare all; Tracey
Emin's *My Bed* (1998) displays the dirt of intimacy in brazen splendor. An archive of

detritus is not new; it could be said that much of human life is spent managing the dirt. However, a neighbourhood as seen through its trash brings a new level of intimate exchange between inhabitant and place.

How to know a place defined by constant transformation, demolition, renovation, and re-use? A poetics of trash lends some answers. Dana Prieto creates a cartography of personal encounters as varied, inconsistent, and vital as the places it represents.

Sitting down with Dana Prieto we discuss the beginnings of her installation *Out of place Don't Forget To*, displayed on the wall behind us. Secured to the wall with masking tape, the items appear carefully organized, though no obvious formula emerges: like-shapes form a vertical display of looping elastics, a BIC lighter, fragments of construction materials fill the space in between. An ominous work glove hangs half-inflated, nestled between remnants of construction barriers that partially warn “caution” and “danger.” The display expands across the wall to include artificial plant, bottle caps, plastics, twisted metals, and bits of packaging. The formal properties are visually fascinating: an indulgent mixture of industrial waste and city debris.

Dana explains that the objects were foraged during her walks around the gallery's neighbourhood. Guided by her interest in material histories, evidenced by her recent work, *The Rags Between Us* (2015)—an expansive performative project where the artist explored story sharing, intimacy, and gender through collected cloths—in this installation Prieto shares a portrait of the neighbourhood through its (previously) forgotten and unwanted debris.

The artist does not have criteria for her collection aside from their found status. The

selection process is entirely emotive—the objects more or less find her. The area, Toronto's transforming (gentrifying) west-end, finds its own logic to what is left behind. As we investigate and discuss her finds, the dots start to connect and stories are pulled from the wall.

I recognize a leathered banana peel from its familiar blue sticker. I don't know this at the time but on the blue sticker is an image of Miss Chiquita of Chiquita Brands International Inc., a smiling Latin American woman who was brought to life in 1944 by Elsa Carmen. Miss Chiquita's look references the "tutti-frutti" outfit, famously worn by the famous Luso-Brazilian actress and songstress Carmen Miranda in American film, *The Gang's All Here* (1943). I watch Miranda on a clip recovered off YouTube, shaking her hips while voluptuous Latinas dance with pre-Oldenburg banana props on a highly artificial island set. The dancers' bodies choreograph quasi-vaginal forms, raising the overtly sexual symbolism of the scene. The Lady of Fruit, a fertility goddess for the South's raw materials, shipped to the North for consumption.¹

- Robert Stam

It's true that the collection is an exercise in care, story-telling, and the afterlife of

¹ Robert Stam. "Carmen Miranda, Grande Otelo, and the *Chanchada*," *Tropical Multiculturalism: A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 84.

objects. On closer inspection, I find that the objects are annotated with small handwritten narratives that vary from single adjectives to fragments of personal experience: *And you forgot to climb those stairs/ And we thought we would be able to fix it...*The plastic bag holding the banana peel reads *Export*, its meaning explicit. The wall display offers a poetic mediation on the secret life of objects—the ways they gather economies of affect, circulation, personal histories, and geographies. Poetry and garbage are not unlike, sharing similarities through their excessive natures, surplus to the economies of language and production while revealing their mechanisms.

A Nestle wrapper from a Kit-Kat bar is pinned to the wall and Dana shares her experience of smelling chocolate during her walk, at the time unaware of the Nestle factory's nearby location on Sterling Road. Her distaste in the company is evident and backed by criticism of Nestle's exploitation of Ontario's water, their violations against fair labour regulations in their cocoa bean supply, among many other reports over the years. The candy bar wrapper is surrounded by rubble from the area—material evidence of the continuous rebuilding.

There's more to uncover from the heap: an instructional article on Cree settlement, a Backwoods "Wild n' Mild" cigar package sold at local pipe shop, packaging with French inscriptions—one of the few traces in Toronto of our bilingual national identity. We talk about object relations and how stories travel. For the artist, the wall display is a roadmap of intersectional stories both political and personal. Is it a portrait of the artist or a portrait of the neighbourhood? Maybe both, perhaps neither. What can be gleaned is an

homage to materials' afterlives once they've left their circuits of distribution and consumption.

The initial display formulates the basis for *Out of place ~~Don't Forget To~~* and from there the project continues to expand into the performative. The approach is ecological: Dana returns to the site where she found each object and leaves poetry in its place, reinforcing a reciprocal exchange of value. The artist then invites people to interject their own stories about the neighbourhood, resuscitating unremembered and erased narratives with oral history and object lessons. Some objects are translated into edible chocolate that visitors are invited to eat. I'm reminded of the way children put objects in their mouths to explore their taste and feel, to understand the world through nonverbal methods. *Out of place ~~Don't Forget To~~* encourages people to participate with their environment through intimate exchanges apart from economic cycles that have dominated the area's social history. Disrupting these larger narratives, the artist offers an invitation to participate in the vibrancy of the area through material and memory, towards a poetics of trash.

-Sara Nicole England

This exhibition and essay were created during Xspace's summer residency for OCAD U graduates.