

Lisa Steele / Kim Tomczak
...before I wake

June 6 - September 13, 2003
Opening on June 5, 2003

With an exhibition catalogue. Text by Paul Ardenne

With this exhibition of video, installation and photo prints, Canadian artists Steele and Tomczak begin a new phase of work in their 20 year collaboration, exploring the delicate relationship between fear, faith and death. This exhibition is anchored by *The Blood Records*, (world premiere in 1996 at the Museum of Modern Art, NY) their video work of fictive history set in the Canadian prairies in 1944, when tuberculosis swept the world. In this work, the visually austere opening gives way to the rich, fevered interior visions of a young girl on the verge of puberty, beset with disease and love concurrently. This is a work of stunning images and allegorical significance, paralleling modern day plagues such as AIDS with its interrogation of the relationship between the individual body and the body social. The exhibition continues with *"...bump in the night"*, a new work adapted from an earlier audio work of the same name done in 2000. For this work, the artists interviewed a variety of 16-18 year old young people who were just about the graduate from high school in Toronto. Instead of asking the usual questions ("How will you make the world a better place? What are your dreams and aspirations?"), Steele and Tomczak, after a few innocuous introductory questions, asked the young people what they were afraid of, what were their nightmares. The answers are heartbreaking and honest. Teenagers, it turns out, fear the same things we all do. The work, originally a series of audio interviews, is presented for the first time in this exhibition as a series of *Giclee* prints, text over image. The photographs were taken at the same school in Toronto where the original interviews were conducted. *"Make Love Not War"* is an extension of the artists' small scale video intrusions into every-day life (series title "Method on the Run"). Again, the political slogan intersects with the ordinary via its installation location (here a hallway, a place for passing through). Juxtaposed with non-political imagery, the slogan operates as a post-card from the front (and back). The jewel-like visual calls attention and lingers, as an object to be filed, along with words that are already part of history (and histories, both private and public). *"We're Getting Younger All the Time"*, a large-scale video projection first exhibited in 2001 in London, marks a return to the process-based video explorations of both artists' beginnings with video in the mid-70s. This work began as a visual experiment and exists as a meditation and reflection on aging, a catalogue of the body and its sense of the 'here and now' as it proceeds to the 'there and then'. This work evokes the past as it plays on the present, a hermeneutic on being here (now). The final work in the exhibition *"Practicing Death"* radiates between faith and fear, palpably exploring the sense of trust that the artists sink into each night, as they lay down to sleep.

"Here the body never triumphs, it never appears in the light of natural or sacred authority. Rather, it is a fragile, uncertain figure, hemmed on all sides by overly strong desire, by passing time, by failing health, by constraining prohibition, by destructive acts and inappropriate demands. And thus a figure never alone, for whom social belonging relates more to the crucifying ordeal of mandatory attachment rather than happy social fusion. Steele and Tomczak's oeuvre opens itself to a genealogy of contemporary corporeality, in this case to document a cleavage, the unfeasibility of full vitality." (Paul Ardenne, in "Steele and Tomczak : Trouble Tracked to the Depths of the Body", exhibition catalogue of the Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris, June 2003)

Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak teach in the Visual Studies Program, Department of Fine Art, University of Toronto. They are co-founders and directors of Vtape, one of Canada's most important video distribution centers. They are recognized as leading figures in the world of video art, having extensively exhibited in international festivals in the past ten years. Steele and Tomczak are regular participants in the Rencontres Vidéo Arts Plastiques, a video festival hosted by the Centre d'Art Contemporain de Basse-Normandie in Hérouville Saint-Clair (France), where their recent work was once again screened in 2002. Steele and Tomczak have attended numerous other international events, including: *The End*, Chisenhale Gallery, London (2000); *Concerning Memory*, Camberwell College of Arts Gallery, London (2000); *Cinematografia Invitada: Canada*, Madrid (2000); *10 Semana deCine Experimental*, WRO 99; *7th International Media Art Biennale*, Warsaw, Poland; and *Imagine Leggera/Palermo International Video Art Festival* (1999). Shows devoted solely to their work were notably held in 2002 at the Frankfurt Film Festival and at 6-Pack Film in Vienna, in 2001 at the International Kurzfilmtage, Oberhausen (Germany), in 2000 at the City of York Public Gallery, York (England), and in 1996 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. One of their major works, *The Blood Records*, was distributed to many cities throughout Canada by The Oakville Galleries between 1998 et 2002. Steele and Tomczak were honored with the Canada Art Council's 1993 *Bell Canada Award for Excellence in Video* as well as the *Peter Herndorf Award for Media Arts* (Toronto Arts Award).