

PORTRAIT OF RESISTANCE

The Art & Activism of Carole Condé & Karl Beveridge



BY DIRECTOR / PRODUCER: ROZ OWEN & EDITOR / PRODUCER: JIM MILLER

“essential viewing”

Murray Whyte, Toronto STAR

the press package



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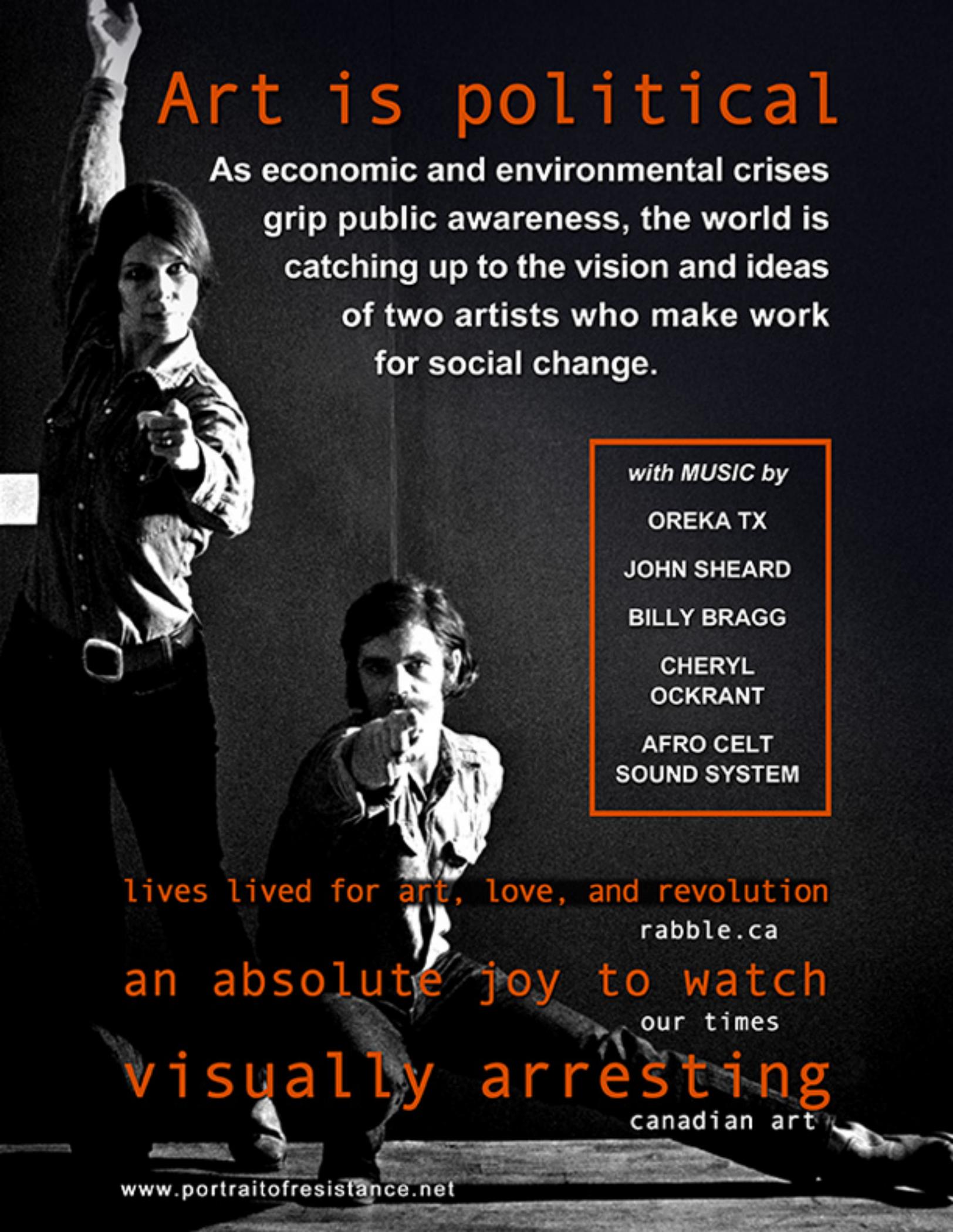
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As economic and environmental crises grip public awareness, the world is catching up to the vision and ideas of two artists who make work for social change.

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PORTRAIT OF RESISTANCE

The Art & Activism of Carole Condé & Karl Beveridge



Feature documentary: arts / photography / social justice / environment
Director/Producer Roz Owen and Editor/Producer Jim Miller
1 X 72 minutes / HD 16:9 / © October 2011

SYNOPSIS: As the wealth-divide and environmental crises grip public awareness, the world is finally catching up to the ideas and vision of two artist-activists who have been making work for social change since the mid 70's. Inspired by their playful wit and visual innovations, **PORTRAIT OF RESISTANCE** intimately captures Carole Condé & Karl Beveridge as they create provocative staged photographs — about the environment, the rights of workers and the current global financial crisis.

“PORTRAIT OF RESISTANCE begins in the furor and confusion of the 2010 G20 protests in Toronto, with Condé and Beveridge, both of whom are in their sixties, standing gamely in the middle of the fray

It's an arresting overture”

Adam Nayman, POV

*“The film, like Condé & Beveridge's art, is brimming with life
...very much a film about solidarity and the importance of community*

...an absolute joy to watch”

Rachel E. Beattie, OUR Times

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PRESS for

PORTRAIT OF RESISTANCE:

The Art & Activism of Carole Condé & Karl Beveridge

Condé & Beveridge are the subject of a feature documentary at the Reel Artists Film Festival on Feb. 24th. Called *Portrait of Resistance*, it is, like them, **frank, incisive, and more than a little funny.**

Murray Whyte
TORONTO STAR — February 4th, 2012

There is a strong temptation when writing about *Portrait of Resistance* to focus mainly on the work of Condé and Beveridge because it is so beautiful and powerful. But the way Owen and Miller have brought all the many strands of these two creative arts workers' lives and work together is **masterful.**

Rachel E. Beattie
OUR TIMES magazine — March, 2012

Portrait of Resistance provides an in-depth examination of the artists' methods of collaboration. Most significant is the **visually arresting** manner in which the filmmakers have engaged with the oeuvre; in the film, figures within the artists' tableaux come alive to reveal insights, giving voice to those within the image in a manner analogous with the artists' ethos.

Sarah E.K. Smith
CANADIAN ART — February 9th, 2012

An inspiring film as much for its elegant execution, as for its subtext that **lives lived for art, love, and revolution can be so fulfilling.**

Humberto DaSilva
RABBLE.ca — October 2011

Portrait of Resistance: A clear-eyed, comprehensive look at the career of seminal Canadian artist couple Condé and Beveridge, who sacrificed promising conventional careers decades ago to ally themselves with labour movements in hopes of giving voice to the disenfranchised. **Essential viewing for any Canadian art lover.**

Murray Whyte
TORONTO STAR — February 22, 2012

A FILM BY PRODUCER/DIRECTOR ROZ OWEN AND PRODUCER/EDITOR JIM MILLER
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POV

“(the film) begins in the furor and confusion of the 2010 G20 protests in Toronto . . .
It’s an arresting overture...”



Adam Nayman reviews

PORTRAIT OF RESISTANCE

excerpted from POVs Spring issue
review of the 2012 REEL ARTISTS
FILM FESTIVAL where Adam features
Portrait of Resistance, devoting the
second half of his article to the film.

If Toscani’s work is articulate, the tableaux vivants of the Toronto-based photographers Carol Condé and Karl Beveridge are positively loquacious: proof that sometimes a picture really is worth a thousand pointed words. Their photo collages, which use a combination of stately classicism and sly postmodernism to probe global states of social, economic and religious inequality, are multilayered and elaborately staged, often using real activists as models. Their strange, surreal juxtapositions have an aesthetic power that heightens the political content, creating a sense of outrage melded to a sense of humour.

Roz Owen’s fine documentary *Portrait of Resistance* similarly works on two levels: as an informative primer for the uninitiated on a major body of work in modern Canadian art, and as a deeply affectionate profile of a couple who’ve lived and worked together for four decades. Owen conceived the film when she and her longtime collaborator Jim Miller (the film’s editor and producer) met with Condé and Beveridge for dinner in 2007, when the photographers were working on a monumental piece modelled after Brueghel’s epochal painting *Fall of the Rebel Angels*. Their version, entitled *The Fall of Water*, recast the *Battle in Heaven* as a sprawling, violently contested fight over two kinds of flow: that of water and, more importantly, cash which determines who controls the worldwide sup-

ply. The visual quotations of Brueghel are quite specific, relacing the painter's sevenheaded dragon with headshots of the heads of seven major water corporations. It's not subtle, but then neither was Brueghel (who, coincidentally, was also paid homage to in the Polish artist Lech Majewski's extraordinary 2011 feature *The Mill and The Cross*).

"I was struck by the extraordinary beauty and complexity and depth of ideas that they were working with," says Owen. "When I sat down for dinner it popped out of my mouth: 'We have to make a film about you two.'" Appropriately enough, given its title, *Portrait of Resistance* begins in the furor and confusion of the 2010 G20 protests in Toronto, with Condé and Beveridge, both of whom are in their sixties, standing gamely in the middle of the fray. It's an arresting overture that speaks to the ongoing commitment of two people who got their counterculture bona fides back in the 1960s, when they were art-school loiterers in Yorkville.

It also illustrates their eye for a good story. Given that so many of their collages depict riotous clashes between symbols of authority and the underclass, the teeming throng of the G20 was fertile ground for inspiration, the logical follow-up to projects where they have documented and aestheticized labour struggles and union activities.

"It was very chaotic filming at the G20," says Owen. "I was worried about getting the shots we needed and Jim was worried about our camera being confiscated or that I would get arrested. It's a strange position when you are documenting an event rather than participating as you see things that perhaps others who are caught up in chanting don't."

Owen's observation could double as an apt assessment of Condé and Beveridge's attempts to look at the bigger picture, a trend borne out in the way that they literally removed images of themselves from their work after the 1970s. Owen and Miller have a little fun with their subjects' self-effacement. In one



image above is the staged photograph, *The Fall of Water* (2007). The first page image is a detail from *Liberty Lost* (G20, Toronto) (2010). Both are by carole condé & Karl Beveridge.

memorable sequence, their ruminations on avoiding selfportraiture are interrupted when a seemingly static figure in the photo collage behind them comes to life to give them a hard time about their camera-shyness.

The man is radical filmmaker John Greyson, and as he begins to wax rhapsodic about Condé-Beveridge's trademark form of "visual or photographic karaoke" and its place within art history, the pair flees the frame, a pretty good meta-joke about their modesty. "Carole and Karl didn't want the film to be about them," says Owen, "but about their work and the community of people they work with. They never wanted to be the stars. I think that this created some of the dramatic tension in the film and is definitely why we named it *Portrait of Resistance*."

At the same time, there is a personal dimension to the film. A sequence describing how Condé and Beveridge overcame the potential pitfall of competition early in their careers—"art is about being an individual," says Condé—is intercut with footage of them trying to build a bench for one of their photos. The DIY endeavour ends on the first go-round with a pile of discarded wooden planks;

a simple but effective visual metaphor for the idea that collaboration is something that you have to work at.

Owen's film is itself a clear labour of love, produced without much of a financial safety net. She says that in the two years that it took her and Miller to raise the money to make *Portrait of Resistance*, Condé and Beveridge had completed the other three paintings after *The Fall of Water* in their "elemental" quartet. But she and Miller saw the project through, mirroring their subjects' dedication to their own palpably independent practice. "More than anyone I've ever known, Carole and Karl have lived according to their principles," Owen says. "Given the fact that the world is now living through a financial crisis—the clear result of deregulation and greed—I think it's time for people to pay more attention to the ideas of Condé and Beveridge. In many ways, with the Occupy movement capturing attention, the world is only just catching up to them." pov

Adam Nayman is a film critic in Toronto for **The Grid** and **Cinema Scope**. he also writes for **The Globe and Mail** and the **National Post**

Artists in the Community

Review by Rachel E. Beattie

PORTRAIT OF RESISTANCE: THE ART AND ACTIVISM OF CAROLE CONDÉ AND KARL BEVERIDGE

Directed/Produced by Roz Owen; Edited/Produced by Jim Miller
anti-amnesiac productions, 2011 (anti-amnesiac.net)

THE DOCUMENTARY *Portrait of Resistance: The Art and Activism of Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge* opens with images from the G20 protests in Toronto in 2010; protestors square off against police in full riot gear and, in the middle of this, photographers Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge document the scene. Quickly, the scene shifts to the pair on a shoot at Holland Marsh, Ontario, for backgrounds to their project about migrant workers. The juxtaposition of these two scenes perfectly sets up the multiple levels in Condé and Beveridge's work. The couple, whose easy chemistry and working rapport are completely apparent, are community-

oriented activists but, also, consummate artists creating incredibly well-constructed photo pieces.

Portrait of Resistance is an intimate examination of the work of this legendary Canadian artist duo, whose art (a series of staged photographs) is both incredibly art-literate and full of references to classical art, but also deeply political. The film documents Condé and Beveridge's art and personal history, which is embedded in Canada's social justice movement. Their art covers issues from gender equality, to workers' rights to, in more recent years, a focus on the issues of globalization.

Condé and Beveridge's work has also

focused numerous times on union history and workers' collective action. For instance, they powerfully presented the history of Canadian Auto Workers Local 222, in Oshawa, Ontario, ("Oshawa: A History of Local 222"), as well as documented a strike of female workers in a Barrie, Ontario ("First Contract"). More recently they have documented Canadian Union of Public Employees health care workers' struggles with budget cuts and the general disrespect they receive from governments ("Ill Wind").

Condé and Beveridge are deeply involved in the movements they document. Their work about unions, for example, is a collaboration with the



PHOTOGRAPH: CAROLE CONDÉ AND KARL BEVERIDGE

Set in downtown Toronto during the G20 economic summit in 2010, Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge's work called "Liberty Lost (G20, Toronto)" is based on Eugene Delacroix's painting "Liberty Guiding the People," painted during the 1830 uprising in Paris.

members from start to finish. They workshop with frontline workers to understand their stories; use them as models in their piece and, finally, show the finished work in a union space. Director Roz Owen explains: "If they're involved with a union, they'll have a show of their work there and you'll see it at the same time in a gallery. They're driven by their core belief in that kind of fairness."

But it isn't just their respectful attitude to others that sets their work apart politically; it is also the content. Documentary filmmaker Ali Kazimi explains in the film: "Not only are they committed to the idea of social justice and the values of collective organizing, but they are also committed to an inclusive vision of the world around them. They take the Western canon and reimagine it radically by including a wide range of people of various cultural and racial backgrounds and they do so in a way that is non-stereotypical and non-clichéd." For example, their work "The Plague," about the financial crisis, links the world's current economic woes with early financial crises, such as the South Sea Bubble in the 1700s, and shows how that crisis affected people in the colonies most of all.

The film is directed by another couple: Roz Owen (director/producer) and Jim Miller (editor/producer). There is a strong temptation when writing about *Portrait of Resistance* to focus mainly on the work of Condé and Beveridge because it is so beautiful and powerful. But the way Owen and Miller have brought all the many strands of these two creative arts

works because it reflects the playfulness and joy in the original photographs.

However, these techniques, which makes Owen and Miller's film so unique and successful, were not a part of the original plan for the film. "The intention was to follow some works that they were doing," says Owen. "But they work so quickly and it took us so long to

"As an artist you have. . . certain responsibilities towards the communities you live in, to give them voice, rather than self-expression and, you know, being 'an artistic genius.'"

KARL BEVERIDGE

workers' lives and work together is masterful. The film, like Condé and Beveridge's art, is brimming with life. The producers have purposely mirrored some of the artists' trademark styles, interviewing the couple in front of a green screen filled in with images from their exhibits. Another technique they use is re-staging famous works by Condé and Beveridge. In these scenes, one of the subjects comes to life and begins to discuss the piece. This technique really

raise the money that, by the time we were ready, they had finished the work we had been proposing to shoot. So we had to re-jig it." Adds Owen's partner Jim Miller: "It forced us to imagine the film in a different way." The result of this practical challenge was the use of the green screen and the recreations. "One of the things I always wondered with their work was, 'What would people say if they stepped out of it?'" says Owen. "Carole and Karl would write



what people had said in interviews in captions below the work, and I just thought, as a filmmaker, that the images looked like film stills."

A documentary stands and falls on its organization and this is another area where *Portrait of Resistance* excels. Owen and Miller show the audience information about Condé and Beveridge in a logical order, each scene building on the next. Each segment flows into one another figuratively and even literally. In one part there's an eloquent transition from Condé and Beveridge's work on water to another segment where the sound of lapping waves seeps into the gallery space, and then the images cut to Condé and Beveridge photographing the Nanticoke Generating Station on the shore of Lake Erie.

Another key element in the success of the film is the music. The songs from artists like Billy Bragg and Afro Celt Sound System are just as culturally and stylistically diverse as the work of Condé and Beveridge. Indeed, one major soundtrack contributor, Oreka TX — a pair of Basque musicians who play a traditional Basque instrument called the *txalaparta* — mirrors Condé and Beveridge's work perfectly. Says Owen: "Oreka TX travel around the world and work with different people that were nomadic, and they made music together. So, they would go through India, Mongolia, and they went to the Sami people in Scandinavia." The music

in the film, then, is a rich collaboration of cultures. However, Oreka TX's methods are even more like Condé and Beveridge's as, says Owen, "they get those musicians to collaborate on this instrument, which is like a xylophone, and they have to figure out how to play together." Miller clarifies: "It is two people playing one instrument." This sort of richly diverse musical collaboration echoes the way that Condé and Beveridge collaborate, both with each other, and with other artists, activists, and workers. The work of Condé and Beveridge is all about community and cooperation.

Portrait of Resistance will be equally appealing to those who already know Condé and Beveridge's work and those who are coming to it for the first time. Owen and Miller provide a succinct overview of the couple's work, but also provide fascinating behind-the-scenes material. For example, one segment shows the mock-ups Condé and Beveridge create, with each of them in the poses their models will then take on. Owen explains: "Carole and Karl's work is very smart and it's very in-depth, and that's why we put those little pieces in, with the mock ups; it shows how carefully they set things up. Every single detail is discussed." As well, Owen and Miller are fortunate to have a pair of artists who are very willing to discuss their art and its meanings. "The thing is," says Owen, "because they are collab-

orating all the time together, the fact is, they are talking out loud. Where, as an individual artist you're just in your head, they have to sort of speak it out." Says Miller: "It made them great subjects for us."

Portrait of Resistance is very much a film about solidarity and the importance of community. But it is also an absorbing portrait of two incredibly talented artists. Foremost, it is an absolute joy to watch. It is inspirational to artists and activists alike.

Rachel E. Beattie is a member of United Steelworkers Local 1998 working in an audio-visual archive. Equally passionate about film and social justice, she is **Our Times'** regular film reviewer.

Portrait of Resistance: The Art and Activism of Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge is available through V-Tape (distribution@vtape.org). Roz Owen and Jim Miller have also launched a satirical website called Right Biter: www.rightbiter.ca. You can also visit Condé and Beveridge's website at: <http://www.web.net/~condebev/>.

Portrait of Resistance will be screening on Friday, February 24 at 5 p.m. at Toronto's Bell Lightbox theatre. There will be a panel discussion with three directors from 1:30-3 p.m. also on February 24, including Roz Owen.

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Art with heart: Toronto welcomes Condé and Beveridge back

By Murray White

Feb 4, 2012

<http://www.toronto.com/print712420>



Karl Beveridge and his partner Carole Condé with *Fall of Water*, one of their works on display at Toronto Free Gallery until Feb. 24.

Nick Kozak for the Toronto Star

In Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge's world, the war between heaven and hell, at least these days, looks something like this: Below, a chaotic swarm of pestilence and despair, peppered here and there with the corporate-produced refreshments one might reasonably expect to have signed sponsorship deals in the inferno — Pepsi-Cola, Nestlé, Dasani. Above, a swarming tower of humanity struggling to climb skyward from the chaos, its haunch defended by a sturdy-looking Bolivian woman beating back the corporate herds with a jagged scythe.

It's called *Fall of Water*, a recent digital photocolage the artist-couple made as an indictment of a rapidly corporatizing realm of global water rights. In the swim with the usual suspects, you can glean the names of such massive multinational mothercorp water giants as Bechtel and Thames Water, and a ragged banner from the World Bank; the avenging figure at its heart represents Bechtel's takeover of the public water system in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in 2000 that sparked a massive, and successful, popular uprising.

It's packed so full of topical references that a full reading would be near-impossible.

If you're going to try it though, check in with your art history. *Fall of Water* is a contemporary,

highly subjective reimagining of Peter Bruegel the Elder's *The Fall of The Rebel Angels*, his 1562 masterwork that depicted the archangels, lead by Michael (his stand-in here is the Bolivian peasant woman, a symbol of the power of grassroots organizing), beating back Lucifer's hordes.

Bruegel's painting seethed with fantastical, gory detail. A vicious, swarming evil plague also seems at turns impish, ridiculous, absurd. Condé and Beveridge apply the same painterly eye to their deeply layered composition, with maybe a little more absurdity: another microcosm shows a sweet-eyed Indian woman clad in a sari preparing to smite a grey-suited executive holding on for dear life to a hydroelectric dam. Righteous though they may be, let it not be said they don't have a sense of humour. They know they're laying it on thick, and they're having a hell of a good time doing it.

Fall of Water, surprisingly, is making its Toronto debut this month, at the Toronto Free Gallery, where the first show of Condé and Beveridge's work here in eight years is taking place.

This in itself is remarkable. Since the late 70s, Condé, 71, and Beveridge, 66, have been the pater and mater familias for at least two generations of artist-activists here. They have worked tirelessly and ceaselessly, embedding themselves

Art with heart: Toronto welcomes Condé and Beveridge back

in the labour movement and generating, with the cooperation of dozens of workers, hundreds, if not thousands of works depicting the crumbling, often violent realities of a dying working middle class: deindustrialization, downsizing, health care, environmentalism — everything seems to have fallen under their purview at one time or another.

So finally, this month represents a mild corrective. In addition to the Toronto Free show, called Scene Otherwise, Condé and Beveridge are the subject of a feature documentary at the Reel Artists Film Festival on Feb. 26. Called Portrait of Resistance, it is, like them, frank, incisive, and more than a little funny. If you'd like to see for yourself, you can go to their lecture at the Ontario College of Art this Thursday, where they'll be delivering a talk on what can safely assume is one of their favourite subjects.

It's called "Art Creates Change." If it's not their motto, then it's surely their longest-held hope. *Fall of Water*, in its unvarnished accusations of environmental destruction, isn't their newest work — it was made in 2006 — but it draws a nice, even line from past to present. Thirty years beforehand, in 1976, Condé and Beveridge had their first Toronto homecoming, a major survey show at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

In the gallery's annals of infamy, it remains a feature chapter. The artists had been in New York since 1968, each developing independent sculptural practices alongside the major esthetic upheavals of the day, minimalism and conceptualism.

Quickly, though, Condé and Beveridge saw its initial, radical impulses co-opted by market forces. Courted by dealers and curators, a sickening sense of being packaged and sold for a rarefied coterie of moneyed buyers began to take hold. Art was wilfully obscure, oblique and exclusive. "That whole process was just gut-wrenching," Beveridge says. "When we'd have a show of our sculpture, so few people would actually come to the gal-

lery to see it. After a while, we started wondering, 'What's the point?'"

Roald Nasgaard, then a young AGO curator looking to make a mark, commissioned the survey for the gallery as his very first show. When he went to see Condé and Beveridge in New York to check on their progress, he found a studio filled not with the sculptural pieces he expected, but placards and banners scrawled with political slogans. "It was a shock," Nasgaard said recently, laughing a little. "But not enough of a shock for me to not carry on with it."

When the show opened in 1976, it was their coming-out party as artist-activists: Gallerygoers were greeted with long banners in big blocky letters, declaring such things as "ART MUST BECOME RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS POLITICS" and "CULTURE HAS REPLACED BRUTALITY AS A MEANS OF MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO." Condé and Beveridge titled the show ". . . It's Still Privileged Art" and used the gallery against itself as a critical reprisal of the insidery, market-driven game of art buying and museum display.

Nasgaard was surprised, but understood. "I think they were right not to do the show the way I had imagined they would do it," he says. "For their own purposes, that road was exhausted."

It had its impact; once the show was over, it went into the gallery's archives and hasn't been seen since. Within its walls, neither have Beveridge and Condé. "We stopped seeing them in the so-called high art world," Nasgaard says. "They seemed to just disappear."

This is what one might call a calculated risk. Back in New York, established conceptual stars such as Lawrence Weiner and William Wegman sat them down in a Soho bar and read them the riot act. "They made us feel like we were ratting them out," Beveridge says. Soon after, in 1978, they left New York for Toronto and set out on the path that defines them

Art with heart: Toronto welcomes Condé and Beveridge back

to this day. “We were rejecting that whole scene, and we knew we would be marginalized for it,” Beveridge says. “But we knew what we wanted to do was work with people, with the community.”

They targeted labour unions, for both their disconnect from the cultural elite and their central position in working-class society, which was rapidly unravelling. Unions needed help communicating, and badly. Condé and Beveridge began doing simple jobs, such as making posters and banners for various unions, to gain their trust.

Strikes were common; union-busting even more so. In 1980 their first opportunity to immerse themselves in the experience would define their mode of working for decades. A United Steelworkers effort to unionize a mostly female workforce at a Radio Shack warehouse in Barrie had sparked a conflict with the company. The women were too frightened to let Condé and Beveridge photograph them for the scenes they were planning to construct, so the artists turned to actors and made recreations.

It gave them unexpected licence: That series, *Standing Up*, became a collection of complex, highly constructed *mise en scènes* that mirrored the anxieties of women’s working life — they were late to be included in organized labour — with the stresses of maintaining a family and home. Like all of their work that followed, it presented a highly readable universal drama that any one of the artists’ working-class subjects would identify as simple, hard reality.

Crafting an artistic language that speaks to that audience is no mean feat. It’s not without its critics, either. “The quality of directness in their work has made some people nervous — they don’t know how to read it,” says Jan Allen, the chief curator of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ont.

Allen organized a major retrospective of Condé and Beveridge’s work, *Working Culture*, in 2008.

The show’s venues seems to bear her observation out; in Ontario, it showed in Kingston, Ottawa (at the local UAW hall as well as the Robert McLaughlin Gallery) and Windsor, but none of Toronto’s institutions stepped forward.

There’s a long-standing distaste for overt political content in, as Nasgaard put it, high art, and Toronto’s major museums are famously squeamish about such things. Though as Allen observes, this is a cyclical thing. “It’s a field that constantly renews itself,” she says. “Really vital art invites rereading and rereading through the generations,” she says. “In the long term, history will be their ultimate judge.”

Whatever history thinks, Condé and Beveridge learned long ago to take their satisfaction in the experience, not the aftermath. “The relationships we’ve made through the labour movements, the shared experiences — those are genuine and real,” Beveridge says.

Condé agrees. “We’re very much a part of the art world, just in a different way,” she says. “What we’re trying to say is that there are alternatives.”

Scene Otherwise continues at the Toronto Free Gallery, 1277 Bloor St. W., to Feb. 24. A documentary about Condé and Beveridge, will be a highlight of the upcoming Reel Artists Film Festival,

Portrait of Resistance: The Art & Activism of Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge: (is) A clear-eyed, comprehensive look at the career of seminal Canadian artist couple Condé and Beveridge, who sacrificed promising conventional careers decades ago to ally themselves with labour movements in hopes of giving voice to the disenfranchised. Essential viewing for any Canadian art lover. Screens Fri Feb. 24, 5PM, at TIFF Bell Lightbox.

(Murray White’s film review was published in the Feb 22 edition of the Star.

<http://www.toronto.com/article/714398--marina-abromovic-the-artist-is-present-makes-canadian-premiere>

**Portrait of Resistance:
The Art & Activism of
Carole Condé & Karl Beveridge**

A film by
Roz Owen & Jim Miller

Portrait of Resistance
premiered at the 2011
Planet in Focus Festival
(Toronto 13 / 10 / 2012)),
and was also screened at
Reel Artists Film Festival
(Toronto 24 / 02 / 2012)

Review by Chris Gehman

The artists and activists Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge are experiencing one of those moments of overdue late-career recognition that sometimes come to artists who persevere on their own unusual path without regard for widespread public or critical recognition, fame or financial gain. Roz Owen and Jim Miller's excellent new feature documentary, *Portrait of Resistance: The Art & Activism of Carole Condé & Karl Beveridge*, is one of the factors contributing to this welcome celebration of two critical, committed and thoughtful artists. It deftly combines biography, portraiture, and historical and critical commentary in



In response to Toronto's 2010 G20 meeting and the massive police repression that came with it, Condé and Beveridge created this single staged photo work that loosely references Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830).
Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, *Liberty Lost* (G20 Toronto), 2010.
Image courtesy of anti-amnesiac productions and the artists.

investigating precisely what this duo, who have been married since 1967 and working as collaborators since the mid-70s, are doing in their work, and how they came to do it.

Early in the film, we are presented with a conversation between Condé and Beveridge in front of their turning-point staged photo and text piece *Art is Political* (1975), which also shows the couple engaged in argumentation, struggle and a final coming together, a recapitulation of the process they had gone through over their previous few years as artists. This introduces a method the film develops in a number of technically sophisticated and often witty ways: its documentation of discussions by and about the artists echoes the montage form of their work by combining

images in layers, often allowing figures to break out of their still positions and turn to the camera, or to each other, and speak. Condé and Beveridge are clearly reluctant subjects in some respects (and this creates a number of moments of both humour and poignancy in the film), preferring to keep the focus on their subjects rather than themselves. But Owen and Miller, working patiently for several years, have coaxed them into reflecting on their early lives and family influences, and how they arrived at their particular method of social collaboration and use of text and staged photomontage to create art in the service of social change.

Condé and Beveridge describe their move to New York City in the early 70s, with ambitions to

have careers doing minimalist sculpture. In the environment of the intensely competitive New York art market, they gradually realized that they were competing with one another for attention from dealers and curators, and that Condé's work would automatically be considered secondary since she was a woman. Eventually, this conversation led the artists to a complete break with their former minimalist practice, just at the moment when they had been invited to prepare a show of new work for the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). They turned away from the role of artist as individual creator for the art market, beginning instead to work together as a collaborative team to develop a new role for artists as social citizens.

This controversial show, *It's Still Privileged Art* (1976), caused a backlash from some board members and sponsors, but as the show's curator, Roald Nasgaard, recalls in the film, the withdrawal of sponsorship from the gallery in which it was shown ironically led to it becoming the AGO's first dedicated space for contemporary art. Nasgaard says, "*It didn't look the way art was supposed to look. And maybe it was also some sort of rabid red Communism.*" The show also introduced the basic elements with which Condé and Beveridge have continued to work: staged photographs, often combining text and image, using people as actors,

sometimes playing an allegorical role, sometimes representing themselves. Beveridge sees this break, which also coincided with their return from New York to Toronto, as simply one couple's experience of a larger cultural shift: "*What we were actually participating in was the end of Modernism.*" For them, this entailed a rejection of the art market as a primary source of income and a disavowal of ambiguity as a value in the final artwork.

Over the subsequent decades, Condé and Beveridge have frequently worked with labour unions, on feminist issues, and with other social organizations, researching their subjects through the direct testimony of those involved in social struggles and often involving these individuals in the creation of the photographs.

This fundamental approach, in which art comes from and is intended for a particular community, anticipated much of what is now known as "relational art." But it benefits from the clarity of purpose and method that Condé and Beveridge bring to their work, a clarity lacking in much contemporary work.

By following the artists closely over a number of years, Owen and Miller were able to document the creation of several major works, devoting time especially to a series about mi-

grant farm labour in Ontario, and a dense and detailed restaging of Pieter Brueghel the Elder's painting *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* (1562) as an allegory about struggles over the ownership and control of water entitled *The Fall of Water* (2010). These scenes are sprinkled with appearances by numerous artists and critics, including Ali Kazimi, Lorraine Leeson, June Clark, John Greyson and Dot Tuer, who appear as figures in the photographs and comment perceptively on the artists' work.

Portrait of Resistance is probably as good an introduction as could be imagined to the ideas, methods and work of this important artistic duo, whose political commitments have probably led to their being overlooked by the mainstream art world as major innovators in the area of post-modern, staged photography and photomontage. It elegantly brings together a wealth of visual, biographical and historical material, as well as critical commentary, with compelling wit and clarity.

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