

Righting the Wrongs

Canadian artist Cathy Busby will present wall-text paintings for her exhibition **Righting the Wrongs**. These will be composed of excerpts of the apologies recently delivered to aboriginal peoples in Australia by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (February 13, 2008) and in Canada by Prime Minister Stephen Harper (June 11, 2008). The title is excerpted from Kevin Rudd's speech, "The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future..." While both apology speeches were hard-won and long-awaited, they were also fleeting as news media spectacles and worthy of critical consideration.

In this exhibition, one side of Ocular Lab will be painted to approximate the skin-tone of Prime Minister Rudd, while the other side will approximate the skin-tone of Prime Minister Harper as found in media images that accompanied each speech. The text excerpts from each speech will be painted in large stenciled lettering on these skin-toned adjacent walls, creating an opportunity for an extended consideration of the words contained in these historic admissions of wrong-doing. By isolating and enlarging the written words, **Righting the Wrongs** creates an opportunity for these two apologies to be experienced as non-media events – in relation to one another and as an artwork. The space of the Lab then becomes a space of re-evaluation enclosed by these white men's skin-tones. Concurrently, the work re-asserts the acknowledgement of past injustice and the promise of justice made through these apologies to aboriginal peoples in Australia and Canada.

Cathy Busby is in Australia to present two exhibitions. In Sydney she presented *Sorry* (COFASpace, June 18 – July 11), a series of some 27 large prints representing the mouths of apologizing political figures, CEOs, sports stars, and celebrities accompanied by a small-format book (*Sorry*, 88 pp). In Melbourne she presents the wall-text paintings, *Righting the Wrongs*, another political and aesthetic investigation of the public apology. See: www.cathybusby.ca

SPEECH EXCERPTS

"The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future... For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry. We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation."

--Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, February 13, 2008

"Two primary objectives of the residential schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was famously said, "to kill the Indian in the child." Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country...The government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly. Nous le regrettons. We are sorry."

--Prime Minister Stephen Harper, June 11, 2008