

PHOTO, MEDIA AND DIGITAL ART

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For Immediate Release (September 9, 2011)

SUSAN HILLER REACTIVATES LOST LANGUAGES AT PREFIX

(Toronto) – Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art is proud to present the Canadian premiere of the installation *The Last Silent Movie* by legendary conceptual artist **Susan Hiller**. Composed of a video projection and a series of etchings, this installation is based upon archival recordings of some of the last remaining speakers of twenty-five extinct or endangered languages. The result is both a memorial to and a protest against irredeemable loss.

An **opening reception** will be held on **Thursday, September 22 from 7 to 10 PM** at **Prefix**, located at 401 Richmond Street West, Suite 124, Toronto. The exhibition continues until **November 26, 2011**. Prefix is open from Wednesday to Saturday, 12 to 5 PM, and by appointment. Admission is free. Prefix will also be open on Saturday, October 1 from 7 PM until sunrise for **Nuit Blanche**.

For the video component of *The Last Silent Movie* (2007), the artist has unearthed a series of vocal recordings from a wide range of audio archives and reactivated them in a setting reminiscent of an early movie house. Relaying stories, recalling memories, occasionally singing, these native tongues are variegated and intriguing. They include K'ora from South Africa, recorded in 1938 by its last speaker; Manx from the Isle of Man, captured in 1948 and now extinct; and Blackfoot from North America, recorded in the 1990s and today seriously endangered. A simple text supplements the recording with basic information – the name of the language, where it was used, when and by whom it was recorded and, if known, the speaker's name. The recordings are also subtitled in English. The fact that the voices Hiller employs speak in what are now extinct or endangered languages makes them more than just the traces of specific individuals; rather, they become ciphers of entire cultures and ways of life. In the words of Ann Gallagher, Head of Collections in British Art at the Tate, "These recordings of silenced voices, preserved into archives, have literally been given voice again in the reassembled form given by the artist."

For the accompanying suite of etchings, the artist selected specific phrases from the recordings and fed them into an oscilloscope. The result is twenty-four works, each of which depicts a single line that rises and falls based on the unique attributes of each utterance. In both the video and the etchings, sound is key; the former creates an auditory experience of a disembodied voice, the latter, a visual representation of the same.

Supported by



About the Artist

Susan Hiller was born in Tallahassee, Florida, in 1940; since 1973, she has resided in the United Kingdom. Originally trained as an anthropologist, she completed her Ph.D. at Tulane University (New Orleans) in 1965. After becoming disenchanted with academic anthropology, she shifted her trajectory, embarking on a career as an artist with a conceptual practice that includes installation, video, photography, performance and writing. She has been the recipient

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of numerous fellowships, including a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1998 and a DAAD in 2002–03. Her work has been acquired by numerous institutions, including the Tate (London), the Museum Ludwig (Cologne) and the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris). Recently, she was the subject of a major survey exhibition at the Tate Britain (London). Susan Hiller is represented by Timothy Taylor Gallery (London).

About the Curator

Scott McLeod is a writer, curator and arts administrator. His work focuses on contemporary practices, with a specialization in photography, media and digital art. Since 2000, he has been the director and curator of Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art, where he also serves as the editor and publisher of *Prefix Photo* magazine.

About Prefix

Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art is a public art gallery and arts publishing house based in Toronto. A registered charitable organization, Prefix fosters the appreciation and understanding of contemporary photography, media and digital arts. In 2010, Prefix celebrated ten years of programming excellence.

Acknowledgements

For their support of Susan Hiller's *The Last Silent Movie*, Prefix gratefully acknowledges its Official Catering Sponsor à la Carte Kitchen and its Official Hotel Sponsor the Sutton Place Hotel. Prefix also acknowledges the assistance of the Toronto Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.

For more information, print-ready images or to schedule an interview with the artist, please contact:

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