

## A CURATED FORUM FOR ART &amp; CULTURE

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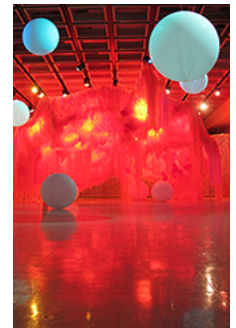
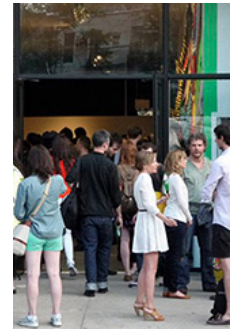
Ryan Fitzpatrick filmed by Karen Correia Da Silva for the poetry archive *PeopleSometimes*.  
Vancouver, British Columbia.

by Sarah Allen Eagen

KAREN CORREIA DA SILVA IS A CANADIAN MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTIST, RESEARCHER, AND INDEPENDENT PUBLISHER. KAREN WORKS AS A MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTIST WHOSE FOCUS IS ON MULTIMEDIA PERFORMANCE AND DESIGN. SHE IS THE FOUNDER AND THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF **STEEL BANANAS COLLECTIVE**, A PAN-CANADIAN ARTIST COLLECTIVE ENTERING ITS SIXTH YEAR THAT PRODUCES A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE, CANADA-WIDE HAPPENINGS, ZINES, AND ART BOOKS. KAREN ALSO SERVES AS A COMMITTEE MEMBER AND COORDINATOR FOR PLAY CTHONICS: NEW CANADIAN READINGS, AND COORDINATOR FOR THE WORK IN PROGRESS SALON. HER CURRENT RESEARCH FOCUSES ON THE POLITICS OF RELATIONAL MEDIA AND EXPERIENTIAL DESIGN.

*Eagen: What inspired you to start Steel Bananas?*

**Correia Da Silva:** Well, I was a twenty-year old living in Toronto, generally bored and disconnected. There was a general inertia among all the young people I knew, and as a curious young person emerging into academia and the art world from a largely uneducated Portuguese immigrant family, I felt lost as to where to publish, where to perform, or even where to find out about events in the city. I initially started Steel Bananas as a zine to cover Canadian art from a variety of young perspectives otherwise shut out of established spaces and publications. I took my 20-year-old obsession with rhizomes and channeled it into building an unconventional community of people young and old, emerging and established, rich or on social assistance. From that ethos, our projects just snowballed over the years to cover music, dance, theatre, visual art, fiction, poetry, and social justice. We began making films, performing, throwing events, and publishing in print. I feel like it's still always changing depending on where we are, who's around, and the socio-political climate we're in. I like it that way.



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MAGAZINE  
emerging  
artist  
grant



*Dear Adolf* (SB Collective Publications, 2012) by Daniel Scott Tysdal. Edited and designed by Karen Correia Da Silva. Toronto, Ontario.

***How has SB Collective changed over the years? You recently moved to Vancouver. How has that changed the direction of the collective?***

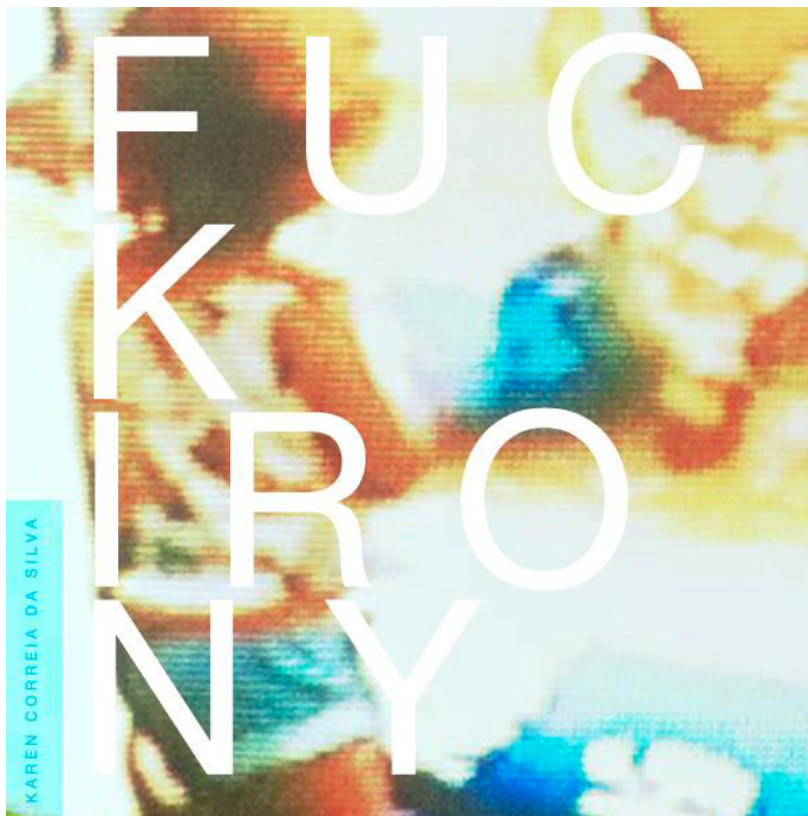
The first three years, we were based in Toronto and enjoyed relatively linear growth. We received granting support from the Canada Council for the Arts, and found donors and supporters through the channels we opened in the small press, DIY and zine communities. When I moved to Vancouver to pursue my PhD, I saw it as an opportunity to open my doors to an entirely different community, but I didn't anticipate just *how much* moving SB's head office to Vancouver would change our direction. In our last two years here in Vancity, we've moved away from the digital world, focusing more on our boutique art press and films. Our ethos hasn't changed, it's just become more focused on how best to achieve our goals with our resources. Many of our artists and writers are still based in Toronto, so it's always a delicate 3-hour-time-difference dance to coordinate between the cities. At least it encourages me to get my work done earlier in the morning!



Performance documentation of *Modern Ruin*, 2010. R.C. Harris Water Treatment Plant, Toronto, Ontario.

***Tell me a bit about your own art practice. What drives you to create work and what are the ideas that underlay your individual art practice?***

My own art practice emerged from the feeling that I was always in between, always translating two worlds. In one world I emerged from that largely uneducated Portuguese immigrant family I mentioned earlier, living below the poverty line. The challenges of living this life included a world full of police officers, social workers, and concerned teachers. I spent much of my unconventionally happy childhood as a mute observing the drama around me and wondering how to articulate it, or even how it all made sense. In my late teens I emerged into the second world, as many people do, that of art and academia. I found this world full of amazing hope and opportunity, but so unbelievably different from the one down the road, where traditions, expectations, and language from the old country conflicted with my coming-of-age as a bisexual writer and artist trying to find a voice. This need to translate just began to push me to speak, to create work that could capture this *in-between-ness*. In terms of aesthetics and media, this translation necessarily had to be multiple, and that's why performance in film, writing, and design began to pour out of me.



Cover of *Fuck Irony* (SB Collective Publications, 2012) by Karen Correia Da Silva. Vancouver, British Columbia.

***Your practice is a very multi-faceted one. Your work is responsive and a kind of translation, but also negotiation, between academia, art criticism, and art production. How do your different projects inform one another? Do they ever compete with one another?***

Oh, they definitely compete with one another, particularly for time. They also inform one another completely, and everything I do feeds out of my own experiences, my work on new media and empathy in academia, and my own feeling of being a *conduit* in my own art practice. My tech-based research informs my aesthetics and design and vice versa. The lines between them are blurred for me, so being a conduit for knowledge and understanding informs and subsequently emerges from my work.

***I am really interested in this idea that you are a conduit. Can you talk more about this?***

I suppose I'm working out of the idea that I am not expressing myself in my work. My life's challenges are beautifully unoriginal, that kind of unoriginality that makes experience universal. Being a conduit between worlds and between the personal and public means being attuned to what's around me, the people, the stories, the landscape. Steel Bananas emerged from that same ethos, that of inclusivity, accessibility, and openness. I am curious about the world, and about how my unique experiences are actually the experiences of many.



Still from *Verbs*, 2012. Single channel video loop, 35:00. Vancouver, British Columbia.

***Your work is at once deeply personal and accessible. It is this idea of accessibility that I am particularly interested in. Tell me more about what drives you to make your work accessible, and how you strive to achieve this?***

Accessibility is a large part of everything that I do. As a young woman growing up so far from the art world, I wanted to believe that the perceived separation between art and life was really just a farce, and I still think it is. When I translate into film, or performance, I believe that the experiential design of art should never seek to primarily confuse, or shut out understanding. Accessibility for me is just free and open dialogue, even when the work is decidedly antagonistic to audiences. In 2011 I designed a series of performances in Toronto and short film titled *Bruised* based on my sexual assault in 2010 – a deeply personal subject – wherein I wandered through public spaces with my face bruised screaming for help. People were very afraid, and that's what I wanted. I wanted them to understand that feeling of dread and hopelessness. It was public, free, and accessible – I'm sure many people didn't even realize I was performing. This is the kind of accessibility that I care about: spatial, social, and ideological. I am always curious about people and never want to shut them out. That's also why SB offers 25 of each of our print publications on a PWYC basis. I don't want anyone to be shut out of experiencing art for lack of money.



Still from *Bruised: Conversation with a Rapist*, 2011. Single channel video loop, 29:35. Toronto, Ontario.

***You often use your own body as the vehicle for your work, and your work is so heavily rooted in language. Can you talk about the recent shift in your work from performance to audio?***

Performance has been the hallmark of my career for the last five years, but the discrete and time-based nature of performance art also limited my ability to take larger subjects to larger audiences. Performance is a kind of *speaking*, so from

there I began to focus more on my voice as a discrete part of my body that could be used to different ends. In my recent switch to audio in my forthcoming 7-inch record *East Van Sound* I take recordings from some of Vancouver's poorest neighbourhoods – where I also live – that are full of mental illness, homelessness and drug abuse. These people are uniquely voiceless in a city where a one-bedroom tear-down bungalow will cost you over a million dollars just for the land. Re-performing their words, sounds of shooting up, or of wiggling out on meth brings these fringe voices and experiences to a more universal space of suffering. The same ethos that informed my body- and time-based work informs the audio, it's just a more appropriate format for the subject.

[HEAR SOME OF EAST VAN SOUND [HERE](#) AND [HERE](#).]



Cover art for *East Van Sound* (SB Collective, 2014) by Karen Correia Da Silva. 7-inch record, Vancouver, British Columbia.

***Can you talk a bit about your most recent projects?***

Recently I've been working on the next season of art books and zines with Steel Bananas Publications, including *Butch Glam* with my good friend Christina Cooke on remaking what it means to be butch. I've also started an SB spinoff, *PeopleSometimes*, that seeks to archive performances by poets and writers in Vancouver. Outside of SB, I'm working on a series of film and text installations titled *Lucy*, with testimony from my mother's experiences coming to Canada, dealing with abuse and mental illness, and all the struggles therein. Outside of all that I am still working on my PhD, writing my dissertation on empathy in experiential design, researching how artists create relational media work that places spectators in the role of producers in installation spaces. I'm fascinated by the ways in which artists can design spatial content for an artwork that otherwise receives its content from gallery-goers.



Cover of *Butch Glam* (SB Collective Publications, 2013).  
Poster zine collaboration between Karen Correia Da Silva and Christina Cooke.  
Vancouver, British Columbia.

***What is next for your own practice and SB collective?***

Who knows? I shy away from long-term plans. I want to remain plugged in to the world so my aesthetics don't become militant and ethically bankrupt. What's next is more listening.

***How are artists responsible to their viewers? What is the ethics of art making?***

The ethics of art making is one of kindness. Not the kindness that we'd expect from interpersonal relationships, but kindness in terms of understanding social positioning, and how the *speaking* of a work of art is at its core a form of communication. Artistic *kindness* can be cruel, antagonistic and unsettling, but it hinges on the idea that the viewer approaches with a set of circumstances that inevitably color the work. An artist is kind when they strive to communicate with the viewer, not confuse or obfuscate meaning. There can be something productive, of course, in using confusion or erasure in a work, but not if the intent is without content. Style without content bores me. I want to make people feel things. I think artists are entirely beholden to their viewers, and have the unique position of speaking directly to people without ever meeting them. With this position comes a responsibility to make that speaking matter.



Karen Correia Da Silva

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FOLLOW THE WORK OF STEEL BANANAS COLLECTIVE AT [STEELBANANAS.COM](http://STEELBANANAS.COM) AND SEE MORE OF KAREN CORREIA DA SILVA'S WORK AT [CARGOCOLLECTIVE.COM/KCDS](http://CARGOCOLLECTIVE.COM/KCDS).