

EMILY VEY DUKE &  
COOPER BATTERSBY  
I AM A CONJUROR



Is there nothing they won't say in front of one another? Is there no terrible infatuation, no secret longing they cannot share, instantly, as soon as it occurs to either one of them? The foundational vaults of repression that are at the very root of togetherness have been left behind by this dynamic duo whose ongoing domestic adventures provide a glimpse of what couples might look like in the next century. While they wait for the rest of us to catch up, they keep busy taking their funny, damaged, word-smart incarnations out for a walk in video after video. *Being Fucked Up* (2000), for instance, opens with our heroine huffing crack, singing a song about a perfect nature world, before a cartoon drawing says via voice balloon, 'Her soft breast. The sweet, warm milk. Her arms around me. I will punish her for making me wait!' More songs and drawings follow before it concludes with a series of questions they answer by violently shaking their heads yes or no. Do we need to know more? These bittersweet episodic tapes might be the latest pop epistle from a shoegazer outfit from Portland, deadpanning their way through another MTV day about getting through their 20s one habit at a time. Instead they have turned to the sometimes rarefied zone of video art and laid their claim, recasting themselves as backwards-talking scientists lounging in the bath.

*Emily: We hated the idea of betterment, which was used on us like a club – ironic in a solar system whose fundamental principals of design are entropy and decay.*

*Cooper: So after years of failing to change the things we hated, we decided to change ourselves.*

*Emily: And now we are conjurers. We can bring anything into existence.*

In their apartment (their world), animals know everything, while humans destroy all they touch. Emily will sing in a multi-tracked cappella (if you can't count on yourself for accompaniment, then who?) while Cooper makes the pictures sing, gathering time-lapsed moments from surveillance cameras on the internet (cameras are a last resort, he says). Teenaged boys, daddy's porn ('I hate pornography. It has colonized my orgasm. But here I am, enacting it again'), dope, threesomes, fame – they swing through it with quick epithets in short, scorching scenes.

**MH:** There is a myth of how you and Cooper met and fell in together. Could you tell that story?

**EVD:** Okay. When I met Cooper I had been at the Nova Scotia School for Art and Design for a few years. He had moved out east from Kelowna, British Columbia. I was an intensely bitter 21-year-old. I told Cooper when we met that I thought it was rude of him to crack jokes because some people were so unhappy that they found jokes painfully alienating. I found jokes painfully alienating.

I had seen him a couple of times before. Once he was hitchhiking on the side of the highway and I begged my mom to stop and pick him up. The second time we were on the bus together and I farted, and two really tough girls were on the bus too, and one of them said, 'Oh gross! Who farted?' That was horrible.

We finally met at the Khyber, which used to be a booze can by night and shitty gallery by day. It was great. I gave Cooper an invite to a show I was having there, and he recognized the style of it, because I had been doing public poster projects in the same style. He told me he made posters too, and when he described them I was blown away. I had been wondering who had made those posters for so long.

He also told me in the course of this conversation that he was leaving Halifax to go on a hitchhiking trip for a year in three weeks.

He handed me a little card (photocopied on construction paper) that said, 'Let's Dance,' which had a picture of Emmanuel Lewis verso (made by Sandy Plotnikoff, Cooper's best friend from Kelowna). I didn't drink and I hated my physicality, so dancing was not my favourite activity. We danced briefly and awkwardly, and then I leaned over to him and said, 'Look. I think you're really cute and interesting and I probably wouldn't say this if you weren't leaving.' Then I turned on my nervous heel and walked away, thinking, 'He'll follow me if he likes me too.' He didn't, and I took the next bus home. I went up to my bedroom and made a poster in what I knew he would recognize as my style. It said, 'Wish you said' spray-painted on it through a specially made stencil. The next morning I got up and put them all over downtown Halifax (which took about ten minutes).

Cooper saw them and made a response poster. He had been collecting love letters between teenagers for a couple of years, and he put one up next to each one of my 'Wish you said' posters. It was the most fucking ridiculously romantic thing ever.

So then we went hitchhiking across the U.S. together. Cooper was really mean and kind of humiliated me, but I stayed with him. And then I kind of humiliated him, but he stayed with me. Sometimes the unforgivable ought to be forgiven.

**MH:** You work and live together, and your art seems to come out of your living. Is there a strict delineation of duties (I write the songs, you sing them; I press the buttons, you work the camera ...)?

**EVD:** No. Yes. Yes and no. It's certainly organic, but there are also things we know I will do (like answering email and writing applications and insisting on expressive emotionality in life and work) and things we know Cooper will do (like hooking up the free cable and reading software manuals and, I am ashamed to say, dealing with our finances). We don't talk a lot about it, nothing is rigid, but we have different strengths and weaknesses.

Okay, I'm not answering any more of these tonight. I'm too tired and I have to shower. But that was fucking awesome. Maybe I'll just take them one or two at a time. These aren't questions I can just toss off an answer to. Oh, I'm reading a really amazing

book that Shary Boyle sent me called *Carrington* (a life of Dora Carrington). She was sort of peripheral to the Bloomsbury Group. She was also very fucked up and amazing ... She *seems* like a peripheral figure – like people I’ve known who are amazing artists, but not spotlight seekers – or simultaneously spotlight seekers and shunners. People, I think, like me. Not that I’m peripheral to anything that a book will be written about. Which could be my answer to your question: ‘Is it painful to be working in a medium where even if you did something show-stopping and perfect, you couldn’t be famous because no one notices?’

**MH:** Do you think that most artists have in them two or three (sometimes it’s more – a limited number anyways) of perfect, necessary things (videos, paintings, books), while the rest is simply placeholders, the work you do while waiting for something else to occur?

**EVD:** Yes, I do think this. I also think, more terrifyingly, that we may *only* have one or two perfect things that may get wrung out early – the product of an unrecoverable lack of self-consciousness that we continually move away from. Then sometimes I don’t. Sometimes I think I’m just treading water. I also think it’s essential to continue making work (for me, that means to write), even when it feels like I’m dead and making only dead boxes of dry dead death. I think Stephen King reiterated the adage about the muse needing to know where to find you in his book *On Writing*, something about having to spend a good deal of time at one’s desk.

One of the really painful changes the last few years have brought is a new sense that I have to make new work because it’s my job. It’s expected of me by some infinitesimal (possibly fantasized) public. I think many ‘professional’ artists and writers experience this. It’s probably one of the reasons that we all make, or are tempted to make, work about the trials of making work. That’s what our stupid, smarmy tape *The Fine Arts* is about. It’s certainly why we make the things that you’ve described as ‘placeholders.’

I could say something here about the accelerated pace of life in the 20th and 21st centuries putting pressure on artists to produce more faster, but I’ve always been suspicious of the idea that people experienced the world differently in the past. Artists have been driven to madness over the quality and quantity of their work for all of recorded history.

**MH:** When I was in film school, I found myself surrounded by a group of singularly inarticulate students – language had refused them, and they were looking for another way to say *I*. Your work, by contrast, is very literary, beautifully written and performed. Can you talk about the relation of reading/writing and making video?

**EVD:** As a child I learned to be deeply ashamed of the fact that I didn’t love anything (nature, bicycles, computers, chess) more than I loved talking. I felt incurious about ‘the way things work.’ Because of that lack of curiosity about things other than human intercourse, social and sexual, I despised myself, in large part because it left me vulnerable to being hurt by others – all of whom from time to time would prefer to play soccer or read a handbook of some kind rather than talk about our ‘relationship.’ It left me ‘needy,’ which is in my opinion the most pejorative descriptor in the English language.

I have been able to achieve a modicum of self-love through my intense curiosity about language. I love words. I love *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White. I love the Merriam-Webster Word of the Day. If I could have only one book in the world, it would be a really excellent dictionary. *The Complete Oxford*. Many volumes. Etymological.

Right now I am working on a project of writing a series of plot synopses. I love the words, yes, but that’s a poet’s minefield. I’ve always been short on plot. This project is about packing the humanity – the identification and emotional immediacy I always strive for – into a form that is both more conventional and more challenging than my autobiographical default. Autobiography is like a reflex for me. It’s beginning to feel too self-indulgent and precious. It’s time to try something new. But then, is that drive (to ‘grow’ or ‘progress’ as a maker) even more self-indulgent? The reader doesn’t care if I’m being formally redundant. Or do they? Who is the reader? I’m meandering.

**MH:** Steve Reinke has been a teacher for you in two cities now. Can you talk about what he’s meant for your work? Is it necessary to kill the father? How would you kill Steve?

**EVD:** Steve’s work is too coy, clever and sadistic. Sometimes he lacks the perfectionism necessary to make the tapes stand out from the sea of mediocrity that is contemporary film/video. That is how I kill him.



Rapt and Happy

I also kill him by loving him and wanting to protect instead of exceed him. And yes, he is me and Cooper's beloved dad, and every animal we kill we drag back to him for his approval.

**MH:** Is it important to know tradition, what's been done in the field and other fields, in order to make your own work? Do you suffer from 'anxieties of influence'?

**EVD:** I think (and this is so obvious it barely merits writing) that it is both a blessing and a curse. It can be crippling to know what's already been done. If I had known the fucking banquet of backwards delights being brewed up at roughly the same time as *I Am a Conjuror* and *Attention Public*, we probably wouldn't have made them. However, seeing truly excellent artists like Miranda July and Eija-Liisa Ahtila inspires me to press on, to make works that are not the shit I usually see at festivals and screenings.

**MH:** Can you talk about talking backwards? It's a structuring mechanism you use in several of your tapes, all of which feature you and Cooper. Why backwards?

**EVD:** Nobody wants to hear this, but it truly is just a device to compensate for the fact that we are terrible actors. After we used it the first time, we of course started to question what meanings and connotations it held and how we could potentially exploit them. It worked, so we stuck with it.

**MH:** Do you ever feel that you've shown too much? When you're smoking crack in *Being Fucked Up*, or dancing naked, or describing your threesome livings, or socking Cooper in the face. How do you give yourself permission to show and share these moments?

**EVD:** I feel that others think I've shown too much. For me, it's like my certification to be fucked up in life. Sometimes I feel that it's a professional liability, but I cling to it as a badge, as a line-marker: I will not be totally obedient to the conventions of public and private. Honestly, my very sick fantasy is that if I make my private self public I can be absolved for my manifold sins.

**MH:** Is art an indulgence, a luxury, an extra? People are starving in the world, AIDS is rampant, wars are brewing, Palestinians are being slaughtered by Israeli teenagers dressed up as soldiers, the American empire continues to pillage. What does making art mean in the face of this?

**EVD:** This may be my biggest concern as an artist. I think about it constantly and have no answer. It's been thrown into high relief by the fact that my little brother Peter has just returned from a



Bad Ideas for Paradise

year doing aid work in Sierra Leone. Another project I'm working on right now is a collaboration with him based on the fucking astonishing journal he wrote while he was there. He's so pragmatic about it, and I know that he feels (as I did about my Khyber 'art' job) that while the work might be noble in some sort of Platonic Ideal sense, the reality is pretty mundane and ineffectual.

Part of the way I've been thinking about this: the greatest pain I've ever experienced is the pain of romantic rejection. This pain was great enough to hospitalize me for over a month after a youthful (but serious) suicide attempt. It was also my impetus to 'find my voice' and make art.

I thought that anyone who didn't share my suffering was either an idiot or in denial. It was all very clear: women were destined to live a life of intolerable psychic agony because our romantic impulse was unmatched by men. Men fear entrapment; women fear abandonment. I was certain of these truths in the way that only a person with extraordinarily narrow experience can be certain.

There was no room in my model for the suffering felt by child-soldiers who were forced to rape their own mothers and then kill them and the rest of their families, for slaughtered or exiled activists, for people who had their lips and limbs hacked off with an axe, for people who watched their houses and families swept away by weather, for people who endured torture, for people who watched everyone they loved, everyone who accepted them, die of AIDS. Those things were too important to have any relevance to me, if that makes sense. When I saw artworks that took as their subject the great injustices of the world, I thought something like 'Oh, issues art. Bo-ring. Who cares about people being disappeared in Chile? Nobody really cares about that. Why don't they make work about what they really care about, like how much it hurts to be rejected.'

My pain, which felt uncontrollable and huge, is petty. My art, which I made with the great urgency I felt about expressing that

pain, about reaching out, is petty. And yet that isn't the end of me speaking. That isn't the end of my voice. Maybe it should be, but for whatever ridiculous reasons, it isn't.

**MH:** What is the compulsion to keep working? Isn't what you've made enough? Does there have to be more? Should there be more?

**EVD:** Maybe we make more because we think eventually we will make something that helps. Or because of capitalism. Or because we think we'll get famous. Or because it's the only thing we believe in about ourselves.

**MH:** Video is a medium that has nothing essential in it. Reel to reel, 2-inch, High 8, one-chip digital, three-chip digital, Beta-cam – it's always giving way to the new so quickly. Do you worry what you make won't be showable in any way in a few decades?

**EVD:** No. I think if the work is strong enough that people continue to want to see it, it will continue to be remastered. If it languishes on the shelf, it's because people no longer find it interesting. I hope our works don't get remastered just because some place like Video Out gets a Canada Council grant to create a climate-controlled archive where every tape in their library will exist for perpetuity etched on special diamond chips that you can plug into your personal entertainment videophone day-planner goggles. That would be depressing. Nobody would ever choose to plug *Being Fucked Up* into their goggles! They could be watching the female-ejaculation Olympics or the new reality tv show about psychopaths where the winning psychopath gets out of jail but has to have cameras embedded in his eyeballs so we can be with him (or her – that would be really good; a child would be really good too) when he goes on his next rape-and-murder spree.

**MH:** Why did you move to Chicago?

**EVD:** To go to graduate school, and because Steve asked us to. Chicago was totally irrelevant to us before we went there. It's possible that in seven years of being together, Cooper and I had never ever said the word *Chicago* to one another. Still, R Kelly is from there – you know, the one whose lawyer said, 'The bank of R Kelly is now closed' when Kelly was faced with yet another statutory rape charge, this one involving Kelly urinating on a 14-year-old girl. Still, the Ignition Remix was *the* song that summer, with lyrics like 'Girl I'm feelin what you're feelin, no more hopin' and wishin'. I'm about to take my key and stick it in the ignition.' The record label told Kelly he couldn't say 'your ignition' because it was too suggestive.

When we went to Chicago, Cooper and I were both like, 'Chicago, whatever.' But when we got there it took about ten seconds before we were like, 'Holy shit. Chicago! I've heard of O'Hare airport before and now I just flew into it! It's like being famous!'

The proximity to fame – famous people and places, famous architecture and public art and bridges and stuff – is one of the most interesting things about going to the U.S. Even if I was in Fucktown, Ohio, or Suckyberg, Kansas, I felt like everything I looked at was famous – the way a waitress put a glass down on the table, the big flaccid families scarfing down big flaccid food. Maybe I'm just describing the experience of the exotic, but the way in which America is exotic to Canadians has something to do with the proximity to – and hence the possibility of – fame. That would be the worst part of it. The constant, vague pressure to do more, be better, be prettier, be ready to pounce when the opportunity comes. It's bad enough here, where it's a pipe dream most people outgrow as soon as they're old enough to distinguish between us (reasonable, earnest, frumpy) and them (grandiose, boorish, fabulous).

**MH:** Why did you move away from Chicago?

**EVD:** Because we were scrambling for money and it looked like a hard year ahead. Then I got the Khyber Art Gallery job, which offered security and a perverse symmetry to my life: returning to the centre on its tenth birthday, which coincided with the tenth anniversary of Cooper and I meeting and falling in love there. And because I never, ever felt at home in the U.S. I always felt like a spectator, like the people I was meeting and becoming friends with would only be part of my life for a short time. As soon as I got back to Canada, that feeling went away and the opposite took its place: 'These are the people I will be seeing at art events in Canada for the rest of my life, and I love them. Grudges will wax and wane, slights and sex will scald and be forgotten. We're home.'



I Am a Conjuror

**MH:** Is it difficult to look at yourself in your own work? Of course you're both very young, but the tapes are a record of your aging, amongst other things. Is it hard looking at yourself as a thing made of pixels?

**EVD:** To answer this question I have to explain something complicated. Actually, it's not that complicated – it's just been described so often and misunderstood so completely that I need to be precise. The way it's usually talked about centres on the word *objectification*. I remember hearing that word as a teenage girl and thinking, 'That makes no sense. Objectification! What on earth could that mean? I don't feel like an object, like a table or a car!' I guess my understanding was too literal. When I was in university it shifted from being a totally foreign, irritating concept to being the perfect word to describe how I had felt all my life. It was about women being objects to look at and desire, not functional objects. Not objects like skill saws. Objects like flowers. Objects like antiques. Objects like children. It wasn't that women (or children) weren't understood as having interiority either – interiority was on display too. Our insides also had to be desirable. Because we were there to be evaluated, and the thing that determined my rank was how much desire and tenderness I could evoke. And that was incredibly painful for me, because I knew that my insides were not desirable and would not evoke tenderness. I was bad and a liar and self-interested. And my outside wasn't desirable either, not until I became an anorexic fashion plate doing cumbersome, soul-crushing drag. But in my formative years I was a little fatty, and inside I am still a fatty.

Becoming thin on the outside was an act of feminist terrorism for me. I know now that it was a bad strategy, that it failed to bring me the results I wanted, but rage was my impetus. I wanted to pay 'men' back for subjecting me to their painful evaluation (and especially for communicating to me that I failed to meet their standards of beauty and goodness). I thought I could do that by making myself desirable and then rejecting them. It didn't work.

It's harder for me to stay away from the camera than it is for me to perform, because there has never been a moment of my life, not for as long as I can remember, that I haven't been imagining someone was watching. One of my first memories of this is when I was about eight years old. We were at my grandparents' cottage in St. Margaret's Bay, and I was off by myself in a field full of wildflowers. It was a perfect summer day. I remember throwing my hands up and spinning around and around until I fell down, thinking, 'If only someone was watching me right now, then I would be happy. I'm sure I look beautiful now. I'm sure I look innocent and good.'

**MH:** Is showing work part of its making (its completion)? Could you make work and not show it?

**EVD:** I don't know if I would describe showing the work as a part of the process of making it. It's the reason I make work, to create mutual human feeling.

As for the question of whether I would keep making stuff if I couldn't show it or had taken some kind of vow against showing it, I'm not certain. People often talk about the concept of 'creativity' in art. They say things like, 'So you're an artist? You must be very creative,' or 'My daughter has a really good art teacher. She really brings out the students' creativity.' I've always been baffled by this term. I remember having what was called a 'creativity test' when I was in Grade 6. I thought, 'Oh good. I like art and I write poems – I should be good at this.' We had to take out a piece of paper and a pencil, and the teacher said, 'Okay, now I want you to make a line in any direction. Any direction at all.' I made a diagonal line toward the upper left corner of the page. I waited for the next instruction. My teacher said, 'All right, that's it. Keep your pencils right where they are. I see we only have one creative student in this class!' She pointed at a boy whose pencil was suspended in the air above his page.

Making my work has absolutely nothing to do with that kind of creativity, which is for computer programmers and physicists. My work is about communication. If the work no longer had the possibility of an audience, I would stop making art with that aim. I would definitely stop making videos. But I think I would start to use my 'creativity' more, because it would be fun and useful to solve problems and invent diversions for myself.

**MH:** Was it ever difficult to think of yourself as an artist? What did your parents think?

When I was about 11 I asked my mom if she would be upset if I was gay. She told me no, that she would love me just as much if I was gay, but that she would worry that my life would be harder. I wish she had had the same foresight about my decision to be an artist. Instead she just encouraged me to follow my interest in art and writing.

We have artists in my family, so it was never a very big deal for me to think of myself that way. It didn't seem to denote any special status – my uncle had been an artist all my life, and he was still living in a drafty garage and doing occasional stints as a cook. He was, however, incredibly cool – probably the coolest person I knew – and I was totally preoccupied with being cool, especially after I graduated from high school.

**MH:** Do people fall in love with you after seeing your work? Is art the prelude to love (or is love the prelude to art)?

**EVD:** People don't fall in love with me, but it does make some people see me as more powerful and desirable than I really am. I'm certain that it makes other people write me off completely, either before or after they've met me, but those people are much less likely to approach. It's a strange thing about being an artist (or a performer, a writer – or maybe just a human). We mostly hear the positive things people have to say about our performance in the world.

If I am completely honest, however, I have to confess that my drive to make work is essentially the same as my drive to make

people fall in love with me. I have a kind of emotional disorder that makes me want everyone in the world to be in love with me. It's a very destructive part of my personality (destructive to myself and to others), and I use my moral energies to fight it back.

**MH:** Your work is very accessible, but it's not tv or feature films. Why don't you make work that formats into available accessible genre formats in order to reach a larger audience?

**EVD:** This is a question I ask myself again and again. The answer isn't straightforward, it's kind of like saying, 'You're a Canadian proctologist, but they need a lot of urologists in India. Why don't you become an Indian urologist?' I work in video art, an incredibly (and rightfully) obscure world where the bar is low. I don't like watching most video art. If I had a big library of video art tapes (which I do) and a tv/vcr (which I do), I would watch tv. I wouldn't watch the art videos. In fact, I'm half-watching tv right now. *King of the Hill*. And the reception is absolutely awful.



Bad Ideas for Paradise

So why do I stay in this world? For a few reasons. The first and most significant is that I am simply not talented enough to work in television. I couldn't, for instance, write for a situation comedy. My humorous insights are few and far between.

The second is that my parents totally discouraged me from my first passion, which was acting. From the age of four until I was in my early teens, I was dead set on being a Broadway star. As a little girl I collected soundtracks from musicals: *My Fair Lady*, *Oklahoma!*, *The Sound of Music*, *South Pacific* and so on. *Fame* was my favourite tv show. Danny Amatullo was one of my last true sexual passions. I wanted to go to school at the Fame school. Then one night, when I had been sent to my room for being bad in some way or another, I heard my parents talking about me downstairs. I snuck to the top of the steps so I could listen to them, and I heard my mother say something like, 'Jim, I'm just so worried

about what Emily is going to do with her life! She's so set on this acting and singing thing, but I really don't think her voice is that good! And she's so terrible at math.' I went into my room and cried, and then I made up some math questions and brought the answers down to show them. But that's an extreme example. Mostly they just subtly communicated to me that it wasn't feasible. My mom said things like, 'Do you know how many little girls want to be stars on Broadway, Emily?' Also, I was never given a speaking part in any of our elementary school musicals. They always went to the perfect blond popular girls, especially Christy and Karen MacDonald, the identical twins with blond ringlets whose mother made them drink whole milk because they were so thin. I was a fat little social pariah, and my music teacher, who cast the musicals, found me repugnant. In Grade 3 I boycotted. I auditioned, and when the list was posted on the music room door, I fought my fat little way to the front only to discover that I had been cast as an extra in the tea-party scene. I was absolutely devastated. I think that's when I gave up on the idea of being a famous performer in the mainstream media. Maybe if I had grown up in New York or L.A. it would have been different, but I think the only real change would have been in scale – I would still have been a fat little pariah, but Christy and Karen would have had their own sitcoms.

Finally, I think film and television are nothing more than the poisonous tentacles of the free market, configuring our desire in perverted and devastating ways.

**MH:** Can you talk about the role of animals in your work?

**EVD:** Animals, like children, are a repository for all our fantasies about innocence and simplicity. Animals can be forgiven for things that we would despise a human for. Imagine how irritating it would be if Cooper and I had performed the dialogue between the otter and the muskrat in *Curious About Existence*, where one of them quotes Nietzsche to the other. It would seem insufferably pretentious. Put the same words into the mouths of animals (or children) and it's funny and charming.

**MH:** Are drugs good for creativity?

**EVD:** The term *drugs* describes a vast territory, but I'll assume you're referring here to illicit or recreational drugs. Certain illicit drugs may be good for creativity, but addiction is unquestionably not.

I'm more interested right now in the effect that selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors and other neuro-active 'mood brighteners' have on creativity. I'm talking about drugs like Paxil, Prozac, Wellbutrin and Selexa. These drugs fascinate me. They are prescribed very widely, in large part because they are thought to

be non-addictive (although when people stop taking these drugs cold-turkey, they describe horrible withdrawal symptoms), and they have complex and poorly understood effects on personality.

I've been on Selexa for about two and a half years, and I spend a lot of time thinking about which changes in my life and my work are attributable to the drug. For instance, I have felt a loss of urgency around making and exhibiting my work over that period of time. Is this a side effect of the drug or just an effect of getting older? Also during that span of time I became an alcoholic. My alcoholism was never particularly distressing for me. I didn't feel the guilt I used to feel after drinking. I regretted the stupid things I did while drunk, but I eventually resolved that problem by only drinking at home. I finally stopped when other drugs re-emerged as a problem, and I recognized that alcohol was a gateway drug. Once I decided to stop drinking, I noticed something for the first time: I had been working so hard at achieving oblivion that I had essentially missed a year of my life. Did I become an alcoholic because the drug freed me from remorse or because I had a dreadful artist-run-centre job and a houseguest who wouldn't leave?

It's such a terrible cliché, but I can't help but wonder if suffering is a crucial part of my practice as an artist. I mean, it's not like I don't suffer since I started taking antidepressants. I still suffer, but much less. I used to feel such intense despair that I became hysterical. I don't become hysterical anymore. Maybe I was more interesting when my moods were more extreme. Maybe I had to feel those things to be able to write about them with passion. I have little interest in describing my emotional landscape now. I'm inclined instead to write about other people or natural phenomena. Worse, I fear that I wouldn't like to consume my newer work, the work I've made while I've been on Selexa, as much as I would like to consume the work that came before.

#### Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby's Videos

- Rapt and Happy 17 min 1998
- My Heart the Lumberjack 13 sec 2000
- Being Fucked Up 10 min 2000
- The Fine Arts 3 min 2001
- Bad Ideas for Paradise 20 min 2001
- Perfect Nature World 3:30 min 2002  
(collaboration with Shary Boyle)
- Curious About Existence 11 min 2003
- The New Freedom Founders 26 min 2005
- Songs of Praise for the Heart Beyond Cure 15 min 2006

Distributed by Video Data Bank, Video Out, Vtape and Jessica Bradley Art and Projects.

Cooper Battersby and Emily Vey Duke have been working collaboratively since June 1994. Their work has been broadcast and exhibited around the world. Duke and Battersby are currently teaching at Syracuse University in Central New York. They are represented by Jessica Bradley Art and Projects in Toronto.  
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