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Kevin Schmidt
Epic Journey

January 12 - March 13, 2011

Epic Journey is a video work with an exceptionally long running time: eleven and a half hours. In it, Kevin Schmidt explores an experience of time in relation to landscape through a highly unusual projection of the complete *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy on a boat descending the Fraser River at night. The title *Epic Journey* refers to both the adventure of the companions of the Fellowship of the Ring and Schmidt's epic undertaking in producing the video. Like many of his works, *Epic Journey* reveals its creative process. Device, staging and duration intertwine in this piece in which the Fraser landscape and that monument of pop culture, *The Lord of the Rings*, are central figures.

“River travel features prominently in the books and movies, so I thought it would be appropriate to take the film itself down the river. ... *The Lord of the Rings* asks the viewer to inhabit its world, to go on an adventure with it, so I decided to literally have my own adventure with the three DVDs, setting up a situation where the viewer would be caught between two times, between two spectacles. The romanticism of *The Lord of the Rings* also seemed fitting to a river journey.”

Epic Journey first took the form of a performance/screening of the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, made by New Zealand director Peter Jackson, that proceeded over three nights. It started in Fort Langley, where Kevin Schmidt screened the first movie. The next night, he went back to where he had left off the night before and continued from there. He did the same thing again for the third night. The approximate times and places for the starting and finishing points each night had been posted, so that anyone could try to “find” and watch this unique cinematic performance drifting down the Fraser.

Then, to produce the *Epic Journey* video, Schmidt attempted to shoot a screening of all three movies of *The Lord of the Rings* in one long take, over one night from dusk to dawn. Using two boats – one for the screen and film projector, the other for the camera and technical crew – he filmed the random movements of the screen image as it floated through the nocturnal Fraser landscape to create a work lasting the total running time of the trilogy. However, the artist says, “I should highlight that the camera stopped because of technical difficulties. The cuts in the film show, by an absence, the difficulties of production.” Be that as it may, the beauty of the images, the bobbing of the screen on the black river, the film’s reflection in the water, the lights glimmering in the night and the spellbinding presence of the narrative image elicit a state of contemplation in the viewer, much the same as in the romantic tradition.

A heroic story that transports us into another world, somewhere between an adventure novel and science fiction, J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, essential reading in the field of fantasy literature, gained a tremendous following in the 1960s. Examining our world through the lens of its metaphors, Tolkien’s oeuvre is considered to be one of the most influential popular works of the twentieth century. It has inspired countless artists, musicians, filmmakers and writers, and its themes – moral philosophy, philology, cosmology – have been the subject of numerous studies.

Schmidt's artistic approach involves an act of appropriation. He incorporates an existing work into his own creation – not to alter its meaning, but to suggest a more abstract idea. His art comprises multiple layers of references. He brings together different “realities,” draws unexpected parallels and stages situations outside his studio, in selected locations, revealing a desire to connect with nature and rekindle a rapport with the natural environment. Each of his works explores a relationship with landscape: an empty Vancouver Island beach where he plays the 1972 hit song “Stairway to Heaven” by British rock group Led Zeppelin, for *Long Beach, Led Zep* in 2002; a snowy Yukon landscape as the scene of a rock concert, for *Wild Signals*, 2007, in which Schmidt plays his own arrangement of the first five notes used to make contact with the extraterrestrials in Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, 1977; and the Fraser, the longest river in British Columbia, flowing 1,375 kilometres from its source in the Rockies, for *Epic Journey*. What comes to mind is the *Lord of the Rings* expedition down the great River Anduin to the hill of Amon Hen, and the finale, when the young hero sails west from the Grey Havens across the sea to the Undying Lands to find eternal peace... And the Fraser flows into the Pacific Ocean, previously used by Schmidt in his 2002 *Long Beach, Led Zep*.

“I chose the Fraser because it is the river where I live, and a way to link the global – the Hollywood entertainment industry – with the local experience of it. ... There was another connection, with the landscape of New Zealand, which featured so prominently in the *Lord of the Rings* movies: it was a kind of resource extraction, just like the lumber industry in B.C., embodied in the sawmills and log booms lining the Fraser.”

Epic, as an adjective, was first used to describe long poems such as the *Iliad*, and then stories “elevated” by their heroic, sublime nature, larger-than-life narratives in which the fantastic mixes in with the real. By working *The Lord of the Rings*, a monument of pop culture, into a night-time descent of the Fraser, Schmidt introduces the fantastic into the real. His approach is much like a metaphor. He transports one world to another and plays on various analogies: between adventure and river, trials to be undergone and challenges to be met, the spectacle of the film and that of nature.

LOUISE SIMARD, Head of Multimedia Events

Born in 1972 in Ottawa, **Kevin Schmidt** lives in Vancouver. After graduating from the Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design, he began showing his work with *Suburbia* at the Helen Pitt Gallery in Vancouver in 1997. He has been involved in nearly forty group exhibitions in Europe, the United States and Canada, and around ten solo presentations since 2001 in Vancouver, Edinburgh, Toronto, Berlin and Antwerp. His work was first seen in Montréal in the exhibition *Voir Grand/Think Big* at the Saidye Bronfman Centre, in 2002. He has also exhibited at Participant Inc in New York, the Württembergischer Kunstverein in Stuttgart, in 2008, and the Waterside Project Space in London, in 2010. In 2008, he was honoured with the Jack and Doris Shadbolt Foundation's VIVA Award for the visual arts. *Epic Journey* is his first presentation at the Musée.



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Epic Journey, 2010
Single-channel HD video with stereo sound, 11 h 30 min
Courtesy the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver