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**Daniel Barrow**  
*The Thief of Mirrors*

followed by *Looking for Love in the Hall of Mirrors*  
**Wednesdays February 12, 19 and 26, and March 5, 2014**

*The Thief of Mirrors* and *Looking for Love in the Hall of Mirrors* are two works written, illustrated and executed live by Daniel Barrow. In performances that combine projections, floating images and voiceover, the artist offers a poetic animation experience that harks back to the early days of cinema and the era of the magic lantern show.

Daniel Barrow is an author and illustrator who, via the art of performance, becomes the narrator and actor-presenter of his own work. For close to twenty years he has been creating original and unusual narratives tinged with nostalgia. In the world of contemporary art, it is a singular practice: many artists draw inspiration from cinema, the media, music and popular culture, but few operate in the liminal space between illustration and writing, animation and live storytelling that is explored by Daniel Barrow.

**Daniel Barrow** first gained attention for his presentations of comic book narratives, original and adapted: using an overhead projector, he superimposes and manipulates his own drawings to create a manual form of animation. An outstanding storyteller, Barrow relates his narratives in an interior voice that echoes the images, a soliloquy that emerges from his visual manipulations and that is as intangible as the light emanating from the projections. In his most recent work he pushes storytelling boundaries even further by allowing improvisation – generated simultaneously by performer, text and audience – to affect the outcome. Over the past four years he has been expanding his performance approach by multiplying the superimposition and interaction of movements, drawings and textures, sometimes manipulating as many as five or six layers of mobile images and using four projectors at once.

With his Victorian-flavoured illustrations and stories that fluctuate between the fantastic and the tragic – conveyed via the extraordinarily compelling rhythm and tone of his own voice – Daniel Barrow takes us into a world of wonder. “I love the Victorian era,” he says, “because it’s so theatrical, so expressive.” Winner of the 2010 Sobey Art Award, the artist was selected for having created, since 1993, “a unique, self-sustaining fictional world... Wry, politically astute, and strangely heartbreaking.”

Over the years, Daniel Barrow has developed a highly personal visual language. With an evident penchant for ribbons, masks, hands with long expressive fingers and pastel colours that conjure faded flowers, he often adds a touch of the grotesque to the beauty of his retro images. In both *The Thief of Mirrors* and *Looking for Love in the Hall of Mirrors*, the mirror plays a leading role.

The mirror, ambiguous and enigmatic, is an ongoing source of inspiration: throughout the history of painting countless artists have exploited the illusions it can create. It is often central to the “picture-within-a-picture” of the *mise en abyme*, and many works feature reflected images (famous examples being Van Eyck’s Arnolfini portrait, *Las Meninas* by Velázquez, and paintings by Manet and Magritte). Contemporary artists who continue to explore the physical possibilities and symbolic potential of the mirror are legion. No longer the rare luxury item it was during the seventeenth century, even less the disturbing and malevolently powerful object of medieval times, the mirror has become a ubiquitous part of everyday life. Nevertheless, the stories of Narcissus, Perseus, Orpheus and Alice are engraved in the collective imagination. The mirror, defined by Lacan as the “symbolic matrix,”<sup>1</sup> is part of the quest for identity and central to the notion of the self.

Silent witness to a range of desires and anxieties, the mirror has been a recurring feature of Daniel Barrow’s work since its outset. “Elementally, I think I am fascinated by mirrors because they are framed. Windows, screens, portraits and mirrors are all consistent motifs in my work. Something about the image of a person (lady) holding a hand mirror up to her face, like a second head, branded itself on my imagination in childhood, and I am consistently drawn back to it. Most of the intensely charged experiences I have had with images happened in childhood.”

In *The Thief of Mirrors*, the mirror possesses supernatural powers. A thief wearing the mask of a sad clown enters the home of a wealthy couple at night, takes their jewelry, kisses them as they sleep and leaves his image inscribed permanently on their mirror.

*And just as the lily pond remembers the reflection of the moon long after the night has ended, mirrors are very sympathetic to my face. In fact, each time I look into a mirror she memorializes the echo of my reflection by branding herself permanently with my expression. Supernatural forces do exist and something beyond life is at work in this story.*

When the wife looks in the mirror the next morning she sees herself through the clown's melancholy beauty. Stunned by her own sadness, puzzled by the confusion that reigns, she can only attribute it to the reflection that is not her own. *The Thief of Mirrors* is a visual poem narrated by a solitary voice that speaks of love, power, the wealth of some, the sadness of others – and of a thief who leaves his sad-clown image on the mirror.

The story was inspired by the “Kissing Bandit,” who appeared regularly in TV sitcoms from the 1960s and 1970s. Daniel Barrow recounts: “I remember, for example, this character appearing on *The Love Boat* and *The Flintstones*. He was a jewelry thief who creeps into the home of women, collects their jewelry, and then kisses them in their sleep. He leaves a long-stemmed red rose on the woman's pillow as a signature and memento of his crime. His victims were depicted as simultaneously violated and charmed... In my story, this jewel thief wears the mask of a creeping Harlequin... I am drawn to this largely forgotten archetype because I am generally drawn to characters that embody the sexual mores from the era of my childhood (rendering a kind of innocence in perversion).”

In the second work, *Looking for Love in the Hall of Mirrors*, Daniel Barrow again employs the clown image, this time in the guise of a Pierrot (similar to the famous portrait by Antoine Watteau identified traditionally as “Gilles”). The piece tells the tale of a man who moves from the country to the city in the hope of pursuing a career as an artist. It touches on a number of ideas, including the value of art, genius, the artwork, the masterpiece, success and the aesthetic tastes of gay men. Through a series of letters to his parents, the narrator expresses his doubts and reveals his vulnerability. The story takes place in Winnipeg, where Daniel Barrow was born. “Perhaps,” he says, “if you have visited Winnipeg, you will recognize some of the landscapes and landmarks.” Other subjects explored are the portrait, the gaze and mimesis; figures mentioned include Quentin Crisp, Oscar Wilde, Dorian Gray, Cindy Sherman and Peter Allen; constantly in the background are love, sex, the imperceptibility of change and the ephemerality of consciousness.

## **LOUISE SIMARD**

Head of Multimedia Events

1. Jacques Lacan, “Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du je,”

*Revue française de psychanalyse*, no. 4, October-December 1949.

Born in Winnipeg in 1971, Daniel Barrow has been living and working in Montréal since 2009. In 2007 he won the Canada Council for the Arts' Victor-Martyn-Lynch-Staunton Award, and in 2008 he was awarded the Images prize at the Images Festival in Toronto. In 2010, while artist in residence at Concordia University, he won the Sobey Art Award, presented annually for the past decade to a Canadian artist under forty years old. More recently, he received the 2013 Glenfiddich Artist-in-Residence Prize, in Scotland.

He has presented his work in performance at the International Film Festival Rotterdam (2009), the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Oregon (2009, 2013), the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (2010) and the British Film Institute in London (2010). On March 16, 2011, during the run of his exhibition *Good Gets Better* at Montréal's SBC Galerie d'art contemporain, Daniel Barrow premiered his piece *Every Time I See Your Picture I Cry* at the MACM.

Following his reception of the 2010 Sobey Art Award, Daniel Barrow presented his work in France, Italy, New Zealand, Spain, Tasmania and Croatia. In 2012 he participated in the exhibition *Oh Canada*, held at MASS MoCA, where he showed the video installation *The Thief of Mirrors*. Over the past year his work has been included in group exhibitions at Threewalls, Chicago; the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria; UKS, Oslo, Norway; Platform Gallery, Winnipeg; and Gallery West, Toronto. Daniel Barrow is represented by Jessica Bradley, Toronto.

*The Thief of Mirrors* and *Looking for Love in the Hall of Mirrors* are a product of the new "experimental animated film" project on which Daniel Barrow has been working for the past four years. They involve a complex mix of sound and image that combines a "pre-recorded" soundtrack and illustrations, projections and live narration. During his presentations at the MACM, Daniel Barrow will for the first time be performing in French as well as English.

#### *The Thief of Mirrors*, 2013

Written, illustrated and performed by Daniel Barrow  
Original music by Gregory Allen Goldberg  
Assistants: David Blais and Emily Luciani

#### *Looking for Love in the Hall of Mirrors*, 2013

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