

Y Y R E T R O Z P E C T I V E :
AN ARTIST-INITIATED,
SELF-CURATED TAKE ON THE
RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION

**BY YAM LAU
EDITED BY CRAIG RODMORE**

The idea for YYretroZpective emerged around the time of the organization's thirtieth anniversary in 2009. The anniversary was an occasion on which to take note of YYZ's history and assume responsibility for its present form in relation to that history.

In the three decades since its inception, YYZ (as its name suggests) has been closely affiliated with the Toronto art scene. In fact, the evolution of the gallery, both in its administrative and exhibition programming capacities, is synonymous with the histories of the Toronto contemporary art community.

Over the same thirty years, Toronto has witnessed the maturing of a diverse art scene, yet it has few venues for large-scale presentation in which the particular trajectory of a single artistic practice can be viewed. YYretroZpective comes about as a response to this lack. This initiative assumes the structure of a retrospective exhibition (a rarity in artist-run culture) and thus the authority normally associated with large institutions. A Toronto-based artist who has a substantial history of artistic production will mount a self-curated exhibition; it will occupy both galleries at YYZ and its duration will be longer than that of exhibitions that are part of YYZ's regular programming.

As an artist-run initiative, YYretroZpective proceeds in an experimental spirit. Contrary to the conventional (linear, chronological) model of retrospective exhibitions, YYretroZpective encourages a creative dialogue between past and present works with the goal of engendering new experiential and interpretative possibilities: the accolade associated with the retrospective exhibition is at once affirmed and deferred into the future. As an experimental enterprise, YYretroZpective is orientated towards the unforeseen. This sentiment echoes the founding spirit of YYZ when, thirty years ago, founding board members proceeded with little more than a vague sense of promise and optimism.

Today, YYZ strives to respond to and navigate through the complex dynamic of the Toronto scene as a relevant and vital contributor. This means that its identity and its role are constantly evolving while remaining true to its artist-run history. In a sense, YYretroZpective is also an exercise in self-definition that shapes the positions and values of the organization. It belongs to a cluster of initiatives that also includes YYreZidency and YYZUNLIMITED. Each of these initiatives extends the gallery into the community and vice versa.

YAM LAU was born in Hong Kong. He received his MFA from the University of Alberta, and is now based in Toronto, where he is an associate professor of painting at York University. His most recent works combine video and computer-generated animation. Lau also publishes regularly on art and design and has exhibited his work widely in Canada, USA, Europe and China. He is a co-founder of the community based art project "Donkey Institute of Contemporary Art" in Beijing, China. Lau is a former, and future, Board member.

CRAIG RODMORE is an artist, writer, and current Board member.