

## THE PIGEON HOMING PROJECT

Vancouver

July 21 to 30, 2005

Artist's Talk: July 21st at 7pm

Closing Reception Saturday July 30th at 8pm

**HOMES WANTED:** The chance to have your very own pigeon is here! The Pigeon Homing Project is a kind of adoption agency for city pigeons. The pigeons are adopted by having a life-size mural of a selected pigeon painted on the wall of your home at floor level. Every pigeon is unique and is only "homed" once. Sign-up today, spaces are limited!

-Annie Dunning

If you would like to adopt a pigeon, or need more information, please contact:

Or Gallery 103-480 Smithe Street Vancouver, BC Canada

tel. 604-683-7395 or [or@gallery.org](mailto:or@gallery.org)

Tuesday through Saturday, 12pm to 5pm

The Or Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the BC Gaming Commission, the Province of BC through the BC Arts Council, the City of Vancouver, and all our members and volunteers. The artist would also like to thank the Ontario Arts Council for their generous support of this project.



# ANNIE DUNNING: THE PIGEON HOMING PROJECT

emily falvey

Annie Dunning describes **The Pigeon Homing Project** as "a kind of adoption agency for city pigeons." Instead of adopting a real bird, however, participants select a life-size painting of an actual pigeon that Dunning then permanently "homes" on the wall of their residence. While she was in Ottawa, I accompanied her to several houses and watched as she carefully painted the chosen pigeons, installing them near the floor where an actual bird would likely be most comfortable. It was remarkable how willing relative strangers were to let us into their home for this rather unusual purpose. Even more exceptional, perhaps, was the number of participants who sheepishly admitted they didn't like – or even hated – living pigeons, but wished nonetheless to honor them in this way within their private homes.

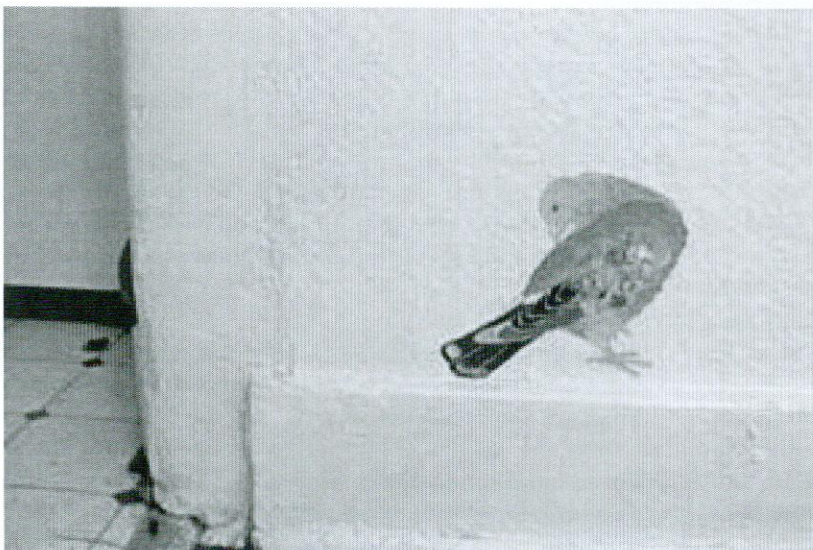
The relationship between pigeons and humans is historical and complex. Quintessentially an urban creature, pigeons seem almost entirely dependent upon human settlements and their by-products. It is therefore quite natural that we might, during the course of our citified lives, experience both hatred and fondness for them. Feeding them in the park is enjoyable; waking to the sound of their coitus is not. Few of us would invite them inside, even though there is a long history of pigeon domestication, the best example of which is, of course, the homing pigeon. Even as pets, however, the pigeon is rarely an indoor creature, living instead in the creases of the city, on rooftops or roosts, and always jostling about the boundaries between private and public space.

Such a close association with human civilization means that the pigeon is an extremely metaphorical bird. Frequently associated with vagrancy, disease, and pestilence, pigeons are also linked to feminine excess through the trope of the crazy "pigeon lady," and treachery through the idea of a "stool-pigeon." Around the time that I began considering the various nuances of Dunning's project, an image appeared in my

city-ward newspaper; it was one of those "local-interest" pictures, which often feature snap-shots of events around town. This one was simply titled "Hot Spot," and it showed a homeless person warding off the cold with layers of clothing, while surrounded by a horde of pigeons. The caption was detached, reading like a didactic label from the Museum of Nature: A homeless man trying to stay warm shares a warm-air grate at the corner of Bank and Sparks street with a group of his feathered friends. Grates such as this are a favourite hot spot for people and pigeons when temperatures plummet as they have in the recent cold spell. This is probably the most concrete evidence I have encountered of our tendency to conflate pigeons with human homelessness, a tendency that is lined with the tacit, rather disturbing assumption that both are a slightly ridiculous form of urban "wildlife."

While pigeons tend to make most of us think of the marginal and ambivalent, they inspire very different associations for Dunning, who appreciates their "character" and compares them to "people hurrying to work in their suits," bustling about the sidewalk with an aura of industriousness. For me, this is a rather powerful inversion of the more negative pigeon "stereotype," conjuring a surreal and rather poignant image of a world in which homeless capitalists wander the streets with a false sense of purpose.

In several ways, **The Pigeon Homing Project** is related to Dunning's ongoing interest in the idea of charms. There is something very ambivalent about good-luck omens and objects, which often seem to take the form of something unpleasant – like being shit on by a pigeon, for instance. The point at which a bug ceases to be a filthy creature feeding on dung and becomes the lucky scarab beetle seems to have everything to do with art. This is ultimately what is at stake in **The Pigeon Homing Project**: the threshold between art and the everyday that seems to mark what, and occasionally who, is welcome in our lives.



Annie Dunning will be giving an artist talk on Thursday, July 21st at 7 pm at Or Gallery.

If you are interested in a Pigeon Homing please contact the Gallery.

---

Originally from Nova Scotia, Emily Falvey is now an Ottawa-based writer, curator, and art critic. She received an M.A. in Art History from Concordia University (2000), and is currently Curator of Contemporary Art at the Ottawa Art Gallery.