

**Bruce Barber, ed., *Condé and Beveridge: Class Works*. Halifax and Kingston, The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, in association with the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 2008, 160 pp., 112 colour illus., \$45.00**

Sarah E.K. Smith

Volume 35, Number 1, 2010

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1066808ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1066808ar>

[See table of contents](#)

---

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

Cite this review

Smith, S. E. (2010). Review of [Bruce Barber, ed., *Condé and Beveridge: Class Works*. Halifax and Kingston, The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, in association with the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 2008, 160 pp., 112 colour illus., \$45.00]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 35(1), 92–95. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1066808ar>

les Conservateurs pour l'élection qui se tint l'année suivante en 1900.

On se surprend également à lire quelques inexactitudes : « Julien (Henri) est le premier caricaturiste capable de reproduire le mouvement (p. 55) » ou encore, « La raideur des gestes [est] due à la gravure sur bois (p. 39) ». L'amateur le moins averti sait très bien qu'autant le mouvement que la « raideur » ne sont pas redevables de la hardiesse d'un artiste ou du support qu'il utilise mais du sujet dépeint et de son style personnel. Que l'on pense seulement aux œuvres d'Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528).

La présentation générale de l'information pose aussi quelques problèmes. Bien que le premier chapitre soit consacré aux origines de la caricature et à leurs premiers véhicules de diffusion, et que les titres des chapitres ultérieurs annoncent un découpage chronologique, les auteurs font de fréquents retours en arrière. Ce qui rend parfois difficile la compréhension du texte, obligeant même, dans certains cas, le lecteur à relire certains passages afin d'avoir une vue globale de la ligne de temps. À titre d'exemple, dans le tout dernier chapitre du livre, « La caricature à l'ère numérique », est incluse une section sur « La technique de la caricature traditionnelle ». Certes, ces explications sont pertinentes, surtout dans une *Histoire de la caricature*, et il est fort intéressant d'être en mesure de comparer deux modèles de production, et ce, quoiqu'il s'agisse pour l'essentiel d'observations sur le quotidien du créateur plutôt qu'une démonstration rigoureuse des techniques propres à la réalisation de dessins satiriques. Cela dit, sans dépouiller tout le texte de ses aller-retour temporels, il aurait été préférable de poser, dès le début de l'ouvrage, les balises historiques du dessin satirique : la naissance de ce médium artistique, les techniques qui lui sont associées, les moyens de diffusion, etc. ; le texte n'en eut été que plus clair.

Il est aussi regrettable que les auteurs, qui ont mis près de trente ans à rassembler, colliger la documentation sur ce sujet (site Web des Éditions VLB— « entretien avec Robert Aird ou/ et Mira Falardeau pour l'*Histoire de la Caricature au Québec* »), n'aient pas inclus, si ce n'est une section rendant compte des recherches récentes, à tout le moins une bibliographie commentée ; un tel apport aurait été d'une grande utilité pour le lecteur désirant pousser plus loin sa curiosité. Cette lacune est d'autant plus étonnante lorsqu'à l'examen attentif de la « Bibliographie choisie », on dénote l'absence des travaux de Dominic Hardy « A metropolitan line : Robert La Palme, 1908–1997. Caricature and power in the age of Duplessis, 1936–1959 » et « Drawn to order : Henri Julien's political cartoons of 1899 and his career with Hugh Graham's Montreal Daily Star, 1888–1908 », respectivement sa thèse de doctorat (Concordia, 2006) et de maîtrise (Trent University, 1997) ou encore le catalogue de l'exposition *Jean-Baptiste Côté, caricaturiste et sculpteur* signé Mario Béland pour le Musée du Québec (maintenant Musée national des beaux-arts de Québec, 1996), tous trois portant sur des artistes dont il est amplement fait mention dans cet ouvrage.

Dans le même ordre d'idée, il aurait été intéressant, tant pour le néophyte que pour le chercheur de carrière, de trouver un lexique expliquant, notamment, les diverses techniques associées à la caricature, de même qu'un index.

Espérons néanmoins que la publication de cet ouvrage en appellera d'autres afin, justement, d'enrichir cette première vue d'ensemble. Une première vue d'ensemble qui, malgré les nombreuses redites et maladresses, a sa place dans nos bibliothèques.

FRANCE ST-JEAN  
Chercheure postdoctorale  
Université d'Ottawa

Bruce Barber, ed., *Condé and Beveridge: Class Works*. Halifax and Kingston, The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, in association with the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 2008, 160 pp., 112 colour illus., \$45.00.

The recent monograph *Condé and Beveridge: Class Works* surveys over three decades of collaborative practice by Canadian contemporary artists Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge. Critically engaging with the extensive range of their work, which functions both within and outside of the art world, this publication gives long-overdue acknowledgment to these two artists who have charted significant territory as collaborators, activists, and poignant commentators on the changing socio-political landscape under processes of neo-liberal globalization. Known for their engagement with class issues and direct collaborations

with trade unions, Condé and Beveridge's photographic work also delves into a range of contemporary concerns from environmentalism to health care, as well as larger questions of race and gender. This volume highlights the critical and self-reflective approach to artmaking that Condé and Beveridge demonstrate. They have continually sought to exemplify new possibilities for artistic production fused with political commentary in their practice, and, as Susan McEachern notes, their work "serves as a self-critical model for alternatives" (p. 6).

Edited by Bruce Barber, *Class Works* makes a significant contribution to scholarship on these two artists as the first publication to offer a broad and inclusive analysis of their practice, starting with their first collaboration in 1976 and encompassing their most recent work, *The Fall of Water* (2006–07). The attention of scholars and museums to Condé and Beveridge's

work has not been commensurate with its importance. Presumably this is because of their role as politically active artists, working in venues and with groups not traditionally recognized by mainstream channels of the art world. In 2008, the Agnes Etherington Art Centre (AEAC) presented a major retrospective of their work, which has subsequently toured Canada. *Class Works* was published in conjunction with this exhibition, entitled *Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge: Working Culture* and curated by Jan Allen. This show was a demonstration of both Allen and the AEAC's continued commitment to showcasing socially engaged artwork, evidenced in previous exhibitions, including *Better Worlds* in 2002. Both the publication and exhibition seek to address the contributions of Condé and Beveridge, allowing for a thorough and critical investigation of their practice.

The publication also contributes to scholarship on the larger subject of activist art. This field is not cohesive and a review of literature on the subject reveals the ambiguity of the definition of activist art and its chronology. Scholarly discussions have continued to question the ability of art to function as a form of political activism and as a legitimate means of resistance to hegemonic forces, especially in terms of the structures of the art world, which can be seen to usurp such potential. At the same time, creative and cultural work in activist realms outside the art world is often marginalized in discussions of activist art. On a broad level, *Class Works* can be read as a response to critiques of art's potential for resistance, in that it places Condé and Beveridge's work as evidence of a sustained and uncompromised activist practice, one in which the artists have carefully negotiated their role within and outside the art world. A dominant trend within discussions of activist art, exemplified by publications such as *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art and Activism* (1995), is to focus on activist art in relation to the emergence of conceptual art and political movements in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, the civil rights and feminist movements. However, recent publications such as *Art and Social Change: A Critical Reader* (2007) have sought to recognize the longer historical relationship between art and activism at heightened moments of social and political transformation, tracing this connection during periods such as the Paris Commune in 1871. In this sense, *Class Works* contributes another case study of artists as activists who have emerged from the key social movements in the second half of the twentieth century. However, essayists such as Declan McGonagle echo the new-found recognition of the historical ties of art and activism by placing Condé and Beveridge's practice within a revised art-historical continuum. Most importantly, *Class Works* contributes to recent discussions in the field of activist art that focus on collaboration as a key element of socially engaged practice, including the analysis of relational practices in *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) by Nicolas Bourriaud and the examination of diverse artistic partnerships in *Conversation Pieces:*

*Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004) by Grant Kester. Specifically, *Class Works* illuminates the extent of Condé and Beveridge's collaborative work with trade unions and situates the historical development of the artists' methods of working with diverse groups of workers and organizations.

*Class Works* is comprised of critical essays by Barber, Allen, D'Arcy Martin, McGonagle, Allan Sekula, and Dot Tuer. It also includes an interview with the artists by Clive Robertson. Following these contributions is a thorough chronology written by Condé and Beveridge, which details each of the artists' works and charts key influences on their practice, including geographic location, projects and partnerships, significant awards, as well as festivals and events in which the artists participated. A significant portion of the book is dedicated to large colour illustrations that reproduce twenty-one photographic projects by the artists. The Bibliographic Notes detail publications that are both about and authored by the artists to date. With this multi-faceted treatment of the artists' practice, *Class Works* is a publication of interest to students and scholars alike, and provides an excellent resource for those seeking further information about the development of the artists' work and its larger theoretical implications.

The book focuses on class as a unifying theme in Condé and Beveridge's work. The artists' engagement with class issues and the related concepts of ideology, hegemony, and resistance are addressed in each of the contributor's essays. In "Introduction: Class Issues in the Work of Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge," Barber describes key projects from 1979 to 2003 that engage with class. He suggests a chronological development in the artists' oeuvre that reflects their increasingly sophisticated comprehension of class issues. He also addresses the artists' own class identification, an ambiguous relationship as they acknowledge fitting within the middle class, but at the same time see their position as artists as one that is aligned with the working class. As the artists clarify, they do not see art as distinct from other forms of labour. Rather, as all artists engage with managerial and administrative classes, Condé and Beveridge explain their view that artists can be subsequently understood as independent workers within the larger category of the working class. Barber identifies *Standing Up* (1982) as the artists' first of several collaborations with trade unions. For Barber, this method of direct collaboration was an important advance in their work as it allowed them unmediated interaction with workers. This in turn enabled the artists to develop relationships through which all participants could contribute to establishing the parameters of the artistic project and the approach to class issues. Barber subsequently examines the connections between Condé and Beveridge's art and several theoretical perspectives on class, beginning with Marxism, in which class is understood as an autonomous series of hierarchal categories, each defined by certain objective standards. Citing E.P. Thomson's critique of this

approach, in that it fails to account for the ways in which class constitutes and continually recreates itself, Barber emphasizes that class is not a given. Making reference to Eric Hobsbawm, Barber explains that conflict is the basis of class-consciousness and thus class positions are confirmed by the power struggles between those who align themselves within different class groups, each with different access to power. Barber's discussion of the different ways that class is formed and circulated buttresses his larger assessment of the currency of Condé and Beveridge's understanding of class as a continually shifting dynamic. Arguing that the artists' work brings hegemonic conflicts to the fore, he emphasizes the significance of their projects as a means to understand both dominant forces and diverse forms of resistance.

The importance of Condé and Beveridge's contribution to the field of Canadian contemporary art is addressed in "Working Culture" by Allen. Notably, her essay was recently recognized by the Ontario Association of Art Galleries with a Curatorial Writing award. Allen details the origins of Condé and Beveridge's collaborative practice, which came about with their first major exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in 1976. To accompany the exhibition, the artists jointly produced a work with the same name: *It's Still Privileged Art* (1976), a series of cartoons presented as an artist's book that critically documented their personal and professional pursuits and struggles leading up to the show. Allen explains that in this self-reflective work, "they called into question the viability of artistic practices of the day and, especially, the artistic purposes and dilemmas that were being aired within their community of peers" (p. 20). When the exhibition opened it drew attention, however it found little support from the gallery and the book was similarly dismissed, censored by the AGO for obscenity and seen as a betrayal by some members of the arts community. Allen pinpoints this exhibition as an extremely significant advance in Condé and Beveridge's practice as the issues raised in the show, namely the artists' critique of the art system and their stringent assessment of their own practice within the art world, have continued to resonate in the artists' work. She subsequently details the methods employed by the artists to create their tableau and discusses how they have continually updated and advanced their aesthetic in the decades following the AGO exhibition. At the same time, she notes that the artists have maintained a socially conscious, critical and principled approach to their practice, upholding collaboration as a key means to effect change.

Since the late 1970s, Condé and Beveridge's work has focused on representations of workers, and they have shaped their practice around their involvement with Canadian labour organizations. In "Two Artists as Engaged Public Intellectuals," Martin concentrates on Condé and Beveridge's collaborations with labour unions, reflecting upon his association with the artists whom he met through his work at the United Steelworkers

union. Defining the artists as "public intellectuals," he argues that their dedication to interacting with workers and labour organizations transcends all that they do (p. 25). He describes their continued efforts to build community, their emphasis on connecting with front-line workers, and their attention to organization building, notably their contribution to creating infrastructure to support and disseminate their viewpoint in projects such as the Mayworks Festival of Working People, the Independent Artists' Union, and the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre in Hamilton. Martin explains that the artists' work has continually promoted and sustained counter-hegemonic action. He describes several projects by the artists in collaboration with labour unions, including *Class Work* (1987–88), a project that he details from first-hand experience. Writing from the perspective of union culture, he contextualizes the artists' work as part of a larger initiative to promote and expand projects between unions and artists during the 1980s and 1990s. Martin argues that Condé and Beveridge's practice has shaped a new form of representation for workers and unions, subjects greatly marginalized in the media. Notably, this practice functions in solidarity with workers and has enabled unions to create a means of working with and understanding the arts as a way to support and sustain their goals.

Writing outside of the Canadian sphere as a curator and writer based in Ireland, McGonagle seeks to address Condé and Beveridge's contributions in relation to the larger context of art history. In "Reflections on the Politics of Practice and the Art of Condé and Beveridge," he resists the convention to identify their practice as the start of new relational approaches or to contextualize their work only within the marginalized area of community arts. Instead, he suggests a significant reconsideration of art-historical discourse, specifically, a rethinking of the modernist approach, which has removed art from its social and political associations, as well as from the viewer's participation and lived-experience. Such a move recalibrates our understanding of Condé and Beveridge's practice from margins to centre and promotes an understanding of artwork as a consistently collective endeavour. McGonagle argues that artistic production that connects the viewer and engages their socio-political context has a long history, only recently denied during the rise of modernism. Tracing this impulse back to medieval manuscripts and through the modernist canon, he argues that a socially engaged artistic practice is not an anomaly; instead, art has long reflected power relations of the communities within which it is produced. For McGonagle, Condé and Beveridge's approach, which fuses aesthetics with socio-political context, is evidence that this historically based practice is still central to art today.

The artists' efforts to create and work within organizational groups to further emancipatory struggles are emphasized in "The Art World and Its Other: Forever the Twain Shall Meet:"

Acknowledging his personal history with the artists, Robertson highlights their involvement in numerous labour and arts organizations as a means to enact change. In introducing his interview, Robertson argues that this has been a consistent aspect of their practice since its inception. Here it would have been interesting to learn more about the artists' significant contribution to the advancement of the rights of artists in Canada through groups such as the Cultural Workers' Alliance and the Independent Artists Union, as well as Beveridge's involvement in the Canadian Artists' Representation / le Front des artistes canadiens. However, the excerpt selected from Robertson's longer conversation with the artists focuses on their early years, charting the artists' meeting in 1967 and the seven years they spent in New York City during the 1970s. This period is positioned as a moment of political discovery and change for the artists, culminating in a synthesis of their politics and artistic endeavours in *It's Still Privileged Art*. Tracing their involvement with the Art & Language Group and associated publication *The Fox*, the interview also covers the artists' involvement in Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, a coalition comprised of several smaller special interest groups. Notably, the artists discuss the struggle to reconcile new feminist perspectives, recounting their personal discussions on these issues, as well as Condé's involvement with the Ad Hoc Women's Artist Committee. Here, Condé emphasizes her position that "class analysis took precedence," despite her continued participation in the women's movement upon the artists' return to Toronto in 1977 (p. 43).

The theme of exodus in the life and work of Condé and Beveridge is taken up by Sekula in "...the Red Guards Come and Go, Talking of Michelangelo." His contribution details his friendship with the artists in New York City, explaining their return to Toronto as a refusal of the centrality of New York. Emphasizing the disconnect between art and issues of class analysis, Sekula describes Robert Koehler's *The Strike* (1886), a painting based on a violent strike in Pittsburg during 1877. He points to the marginalized status of artwork depicting proletarian struggle, noting the importance accorded to *The Strike* is based on its identity as historical record, rather than its artistic value. He analyzes Condé and Beveridge's use of this painting in *Class Work*, a series created in collaboration with the Communications and Electrical Workers of Canada that examines new management strategies implemented with the restructuring of Canadian industry in the broader context of neo-liberalism. He argues that this citation is a caution against the capitalist impulse to return to the nineteenth century. Turning his attention to *It's Still Privileged Art*, Sekula forwards his thesis of exodus, citing the "spectre of banishment" in this project, which rejects

Minimalism, individualism, and the New York art scene (p. 49). He argues that this biblical reference to exile is continued in the artists' most recent project, *The Fall of Water*, which traces the globalized commoditization of water.

In the final essay, "The Politics of Recognition" by Tuer, the historical inflections within Condé and Beveridge's work are examined. Tuer argues that by revisiting the past in their work the artists make clear the contemporary ramifications of class struggle under neo-liberal globalization. She suggests that their work recaptures representations that are elided in contemporary culture, namely images of the proletariat. She argues that a "politics of recognition" distinguishes the artists' work, in that their practice foregrounds the often occluded nature of representations of class conflict and workers, which are continually changing but nonetheless ongoing sites for dispute. Focusing on projects completed in the last decade when the artists began to use digital photography, Tuer examines *Not a Care: A Short History of Health Care* (1999–2000) and *The Fall of Water*. She argues that these works signify a departure in the artists' aesthetic, as they appropriate canonical works in Western art history to reveal the proletariat as well as point to the historical tendency to marginalize this subject. Condé and Beveridge's works, Tuer argues, provide the viewer with a historical memory of the oppression and marginalization of the proletariat and work against the capitalist impulse to conceal such images.

*Class Works* makes an important contribution towards understanding the depth of Condé and Beveridge's oeuvre, surveying the numerous facets of their engagement with class issues, including the production of photographic works, collaborations with labour unions, and their pivotal role in building and working within labour and artists' rights organizations. Taking a step to address a lack of scholarship, this accessible collection will increase awareness of the artists' practice and hopefully fuel more discussion and research into their work. As Allen explains, the currency of Condé and Beveridge's practice is evident in their exposure of the "relationships determining socio-economic conditions...the failures, deceptions, contradictions, and toxic tensions arising from existing relations" (p. 24). Only through this disclosure can we begin to resolve the inequalities of our current situation and in this respect, the most significant contribution of this book is the renewed sense of purpose it gives to contemporary art by making the case that art can function as a form of resistance and enact change.

SARAH E.K. SMITH  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Queen's University