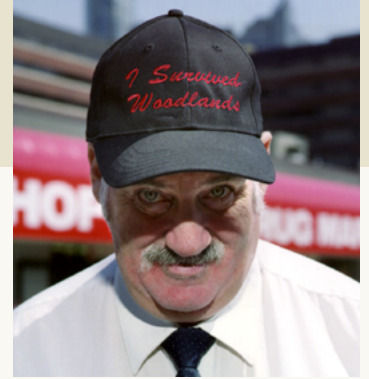


ASYLUM:

a long, last look at woodlands

1878 to 2003



Richard MacDonald, Woodlands resident, age 9 to 19 (1952-1962)

This exhibition by Michael de Courcy, of photographs/text/clippings/audio chronicles the changes created by the deinstitutionalization of the Woodlands' School in New Westminster, British Columbia. What began in 1878 as a provincial site dedicated to the delivery of public mental health services will soon become a planned, municipal residential community.

The exhibition premieres October 28th and runs until November 22nd, 2003 at the Art Gallery of the New Westminster Public Library.

Michael de Courcy is a Canadian artist born in Montreal, Quebec in 1944. He has exhibited widely both nationally and internationally. His work has been collected by the National Gallery of Canada, the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography and the Vancouver Art Gallery.

"For the past 13 years I have lived in New Westminster just blocks away from the 64-acre Woodlands site--yet I knew nothing about its past, present or future. In 2001 our community was informed of the provincial government's proposed plans for the rezoning and subsequent sale and redevelopment of the now closed and surplus Woodlands site.

I began to attend public meetings organized by site managers British Columbia Building Corp. and their architectural and planning consultants. My curiosity then moved me to begin researching the Woodlands buildings, their previous uses and their inhabitants. As I spoke to former staff, residents and their families, I became more informed about the human face of Woodlands.

Over the past 18 months the subjects of my photographs have ranged from interior rooms and hallways of institution itself, to meetings with government bureaucrats and residents of the New Westminster.

In addition, collaborating with their advocates and care givers, I am currently photographing ex-residents of Woodlands or, as they sometimes call themselves, 'Survivors of Woodlands.'

In describing my project to members of my community I have begun to generate a network of interest in this work involving many groups and individuals. Even as I continue to gather stories, and shoot and print the final photographs for the project, there continue to be investigations of mental, physical and sexual abuse within the institution, dating back to the 1950s. Recently BC's provincial government has admitted that these abuses did likely occur, and as a result has issued an apology to former residents and their families. As of today there is no way of knowing and how and when this story will end.

I am looking at Woodlands as an artist and a nearby resident. I dedicate this project to the past community of Woodlands and the community of New Westminster at large."

Michael de Courcy,
June, 2003

This project has been funded solely by the artist and not through financial contribution of any political, cultural, or special interest group.

For further information about this project please contact Michael de Courcy directly.

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