public programs
Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art
522 Congress Street, Portland, Maine 04101
Gallery Hours:
August: Wednesday through Saturday, 10am to 4pm.
September: Tuesday through Sunday, 11am to 4pm.
Thursday evening until 9pm.
Lecture by France Morin
Thursday, September 18 at 7:00pm at the ICA at MECA.
Symposium at the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village
Saturday, August 9, 2:30 to 5:30pm.
Reservations are required, (207) 775-5152.
The Shaker Museum and Store are open to visitors
Monday through Saturday 10am to 4:30pm from
Memorial Day to Columbus Day. Guided Tours recounting
the history of the Shakers are available.
To drive to Sabbathday Lake Shaker Museum, take
Exit 11 from the Maine Turnpike onto Route 26.
Shaker Village is eight miles north of Gray and eight
miles south of Auburn.

acknowledgments
This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Sister Ruth Perkins Nutter
(1907-1997) who lived with us in the Trustees' Office during The Quiet
in the Land. Sister Ruth came to the Shaker community at Alfred, Maine
in 1911 at the age of four and was educated in the Shaker School. She
came to Sabbathday Lake in 1931 when the Alfred community closed.
Sister Ruth died on March 6, 1997. She was an inspiration to all of us.
The Quiet in the Land exhibition at the ICA at MECA would not have
been possible without the cooperation, interest and enthusiasm of the
Sabbathday Lake Shakers and the participating artists. The organizers
gratefully acknowledge the generous support of:
The LEF Foundation
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Carole and Jay Cushman
The artist’s projects and journals from The Quiet in the Land: Everyday life,
contemporary art and the Shakers collaboration will be exhibited together
with historical objects representing the material culture of the Shakers at
Photography
Domenico de Clario at Aurelia's Falls. Photograph: Adam Fuss, 1996
Wolfgang Tillmans, Winter rail, 1996
Wolfgang Tillmans, Space between buildings, 1996
Mona Hatoum, First Step, 1996, crib, powdered sugar, (detail) Photograph:
Wolfgang Tillmans, Bench, 1996

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MA or THE SPACE BETWEEN SHAKER AND ARTIST

Visitors to the Shaker community at Sabbathday Lake in Maine often stop to photograph the quiet view of trees, hills, and sky, framed by the Boys’ Shop and the Spirit House. Wolfgang Tillmans did as well, but his vision questions our perception of this ambiguously empty space. What is the photograph of, if not infinite space divided and bounded by the presence of finite buildings? The harmonious Shaker way of life at Sabbathday Lake, however, treats that space and time between buildings in a landscape, between events of the day, and between people in a community, as part of a continuum that is more significant than its individual elements. The Japanese word ma connotes this space between, this interval of fullness and harmony, although it is a concept with endlessly subtle associations. It seems an appropriate metaphor, however, to conceive of The Quiet in the Land, a collaboration between artists and Shakers that took place in the summer of 1996.

Over the course of four months, ten international artists, as well as the project curator and coordinator, lived, worked, and worshipped with the only active Shaker community in the world. During their month long stay, the artists experienced Shaker culture and its celebration of the aesthetics of everyday life, kept journals of these experiences, and then drew on them to create works of art. The project’s intention was to explore the complex relationship between artistic practice and everyday life, as well as the spiritual impetus of the creative act. It was a unique encounter; each group, each individual, traveled a great distance in an effort to understand the other. The space that was created and shared between them through these attempts is as important a component of The Quiet in the Land project as the art work in the exhibition.

Without romanticizing the “simplicity” or “purity” of the Shakers’ convictions, many of the artists endeavored to appreciate the nature of such an intense religious calling. Artists and Shakers actively, but patiently, sought a space of common ground between them. The artists interaction with the Shakers did not stop with the summer’s work and observation. The works in the exhibition are another step in this continuing collaboration.

The distance between Shakers and artists, and between individuals as well, was filled by a spirit of respectful collaboration that pervaded everything from barn chores, communal prayers, oval box making to shared meals. There was, however, a shared acknowledgment of how expansive and ample this distance really was. The point was not to make Shakers out of artists, and artists out of Shakers, especially as the participants grappled more and more with the definitions of these very roles. The hope was to explore the confluence between spirituality and art in everyday life, without using the language of one to describe the other.

Some of the artists faced the predicament of having a brief, touristic view of the Shakers’ spiritual lives, and of imposing their own generalizing visions onto a complex group of Believers with diverse personalities, ages, and backgrounds. As Brother Albert Bate maintained, the group had a “shared humanity,” but their ideological differences remained immense. The full space of understanding, then, was also necessarily a gap between them. Nari Ward’s Threshold recalls his own experience of this gap, the feeling that witnessing the dialog between Shaker and artist was only a necessary beginning, a peek at an entrance, or threshold to a radically different way of life. But even with this gap, there was a mutual recognition of the similarities between the rather extreme choices of artist and Shaker. Brother Wayne Smith observed “you do art, we do praying”—two very different means by which both communities struggle to realize their thoughts and convictions, and two methods driving both groups along unconventionally lived life paths.

The metaphors of this complex space between is invoked by many of the works in the exhibition. For Chen Zhen, a Chinese artist living in Paris, Opening of Closed Center is a visual manifestation of that space, a dialogue between his own culture and that of the Shakers. Within a space bounded by a series of wooden windows from a Chinese monastery, there hangs an enclosed circular rocking chair—a space within a space. Although the chair’s wooden structure and carving recall Shaker design, it also serves as a protected place, a function recalling the Zen Buddhist idea of sitting at an eternal meditation. The chair can be seen only through the screen of the Chinese windows, and remains physically inaccessible to the viewer. At an opening in the exterior window structure is a suspended altar, made of Chinese furniture, on which objects of daily life rest, such as pots used for carrying water and rice. These common objects are unusually presented as spiritual offerings, and even though they are Chinese in origin, they may also reflect the Shakers’ deep reverence for the sacred origins of everyday activities, from which creativity flows. For Zhen, the intersecting space between cultures is conceived as a space of growth.

Jannine Antoni’s Around the World, Around is a self-documented video of the artist’s own whirling motion in the Shaker Meeting House, evoking one way by which the Holy Spirit has manifested itself in Shakerism. Her motion emphasizes the illuminating space between one form of Shaker worship and her own creative practice. During a decade of intense spiritualism (c.1837-47) known today as “Mother’s
Work," Shakers expressed their spirituality in a variety of spontaneous ways—including seizures, speaking in tongues, and inspirational dances and songs—which were similar to the earlier, ecstatic worship forms that had led critics to dub them the "Shaking Quakers," or "Shakers" in the first years of their history. Those Shakers, most of them female, often received creative gifts of music and art from the Holy Spirit through bodily manifestations such as the one recorded by Antoni. The songs and drawings that the Shakers produced from these inspirations were not seen as individual acts of creativity, however, but as gifts from God to be shared by the entire community. Antoni's work sees her own body as a mediating instrument in a similar way, to bridge religious experience with creative inspiration.

THE SHAKER LEGACY

The individuals at Sabbathday Lake are carriers of a religious tradition that dates to the 18th century. Their founder, Mother Ann Lee, a Manchester textile worker, led a group of followers to America in 1774, to flee persecution and imprisonment in England, and to practice their more autonomous, personal Christianity in the New World. In the late 1770s, they established their first community in what was Watervliet, New York. The first group was "gathered into order" as a fully organized community in 1787 in New Lebanon, New York. The foundations of their faith, which have continued to this day, are celibacy, common ownership of property, confession of sins, and pacifism. Covenanted members relinquish all personal property, as well as the right to receive wages for their services. The Society was at its height around 1840, when more than five thousand Believers lived in nineteen communal villages from New England to Ohio and Kentucky.

Today, the Sabbathday Lake community moves forward with this tradition, although the world often assumes that Shakerism is as static as the historical relics of highly-collectable furniture which have become synonymous with the Shaker name. As the late Sister R. Mildred Barker mused, "when I die, I fairly expect to be remembered as a piece of Shaker furniture." But these kinds of misinterpretations do not deter the Shakers from their real vocation, and the strength of their convictions cannot be measured in terms of their number.

For Sister Frances Carr, "Shakerism has always been known as an ever-changing, ever-evolving way of life. If we allow ourselves to become static, we are in trouble. It always has to move." New people and new ideas are embraced, as Believers actively pursue their own personal faith journeys, never relying on the security of a historically interpreted doctrine. Brother Arnold Hadd has emphasized these aspects of his community as well. "The greatness of Shakerism," he said, "has always been its open, elastic nature, that allows for the embracing of so many things, and for the individual to grow."

The Quiet in the Land focuses on this living Shakerism, and not just the material culture and artistic "crafts" through which much of the world sees this tradition. In some ways, both the artists and Shakers have been subjected to a constraining vision of history, a preconceived notion of artist and Shaker from the past that dictates their expected role in society today. Many of the artists, however, did respond to the rich Shaker history embodied by the Village—its archives, its buildings, its grounds. Samore drew from the fertile texts of Shaker songs and dreams he located in the community's library, and used them as starting points for the stream of consciousness texts in Bewitched by Cold Water Well. Ward uncovered information on Rebecca Jackson, the African-American Shaker who founded the Philadelphia Shaker community in the 19th-century. The intense personal collaboration made it all but impossible to view the Shakers through the distorting filter of an often romanticized "dead" tradition, or to view their lives as articulations of the simple, clean aesthetic of Shaker architecture and furniture. Tillmans' photographs resist this popular characterization, of historized and archaic Shakers. He presents the community and their surroundings in unusual and unexpected guises, especially in images depicting the Shakers in their daily activities.

In response to this legacy, many of the artists have incorporated physical objects from Sabbathday Lake, and their powerful history has been recycled in the context of new work. Nari Ward's Threshold and Vertical Hold renew Shaker materials that the artist uncovered during his stay. The cradle in Ward's Threshold combines both new and old parts of a porch from the Sisters' Shop, which was rebuilt last summer, with two handiers from a church in Harlem that are placed inside the cradle. Their physical dialogue suggests Ward's reconsideration of his own Baptist upbringing in light of his Shaker experience. Ward was well aware of the difficulty of dealing with materials that have such a powerful legacy of their own, and wanted to make a work that would transcend and transform these meanings. Using a weaving pattern that evokes Shaker basket making, Ward laces strips of huck-a material associated with planting trees and growth—between the wooden slats of the cradle, while its interior is covered with earth. His Vertical Hold consists of recuperated bottles, dug up from Shaker grounds, and woven together with yarn. As with his cradle, these bottles are holding vessels which both protect and restrain their contents.

Adam Fuss found many of the ladders he collected at the Village—some Shaker-made, some worn and broken—to be provocative metaphors for the functional structure of the Shaker family that has persevered through generations. Although the community members are celibate and do not marry, they conceive of themselves as a family, referring to each other as Brother and Sister. The Shakers have,
from their beginnings, lived and worked in an alternative social paradigm, which includes shared governance between its male and female members, and a fundamental belief in the dual nature of God as both Mother and Father. This alternate “coupling” is echoed by the symmetrical forms of the individual ladders, captured by Fuss on life-sized silk photograms. Janine Antoni’s mirrored photographic pairs of table settings and stairs, for example, evoke these coupled unions as well, but they also emphasize the community structures which tend to separate the genders as well. Shaker Brothers and Sisters eat at their own designated tables, for example, and enter the Meeting House by separate doors. As with a Shaker family, Fuss’s ladders and Antoni’s photographs can be seen as the harmonious sum of its constituent parts.

**THE EXPERIENCE OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

A summer day at Sabbathday Lake is a busy, structured one. There are sheep to be fed, vegetables to be planted, repairs to be made, the Shaker store to be maintained and stocked with herbs, oval boxes, baskets, and other Shaker goods. The community is an industrious group, as they celebrate their founder’s motto each day, “Hands to work and hearts to God.” Physical labor is seen as an apt metaphor for spiritual labor, the daily and often mundane struggle to live by Christ’s example. Daily activities are undertaken with this sense of spiritual intentness and presence; each act is understood as an affirmation of their belief in God and their endeavor for union as a community. In this way, the everyday, the modest, and the prosaic, is redeemed. And so the fabric of time seems to be woven more densely in this busy place, as even the transient, the ephemeral, and the laborious tasks that others may view as impediments to the enjoyment of life, are graced with patient deliberation.

The Shakers presented the artists with a list of tasks at the beginning of the summer. Every morning, the artists and curator tended to individual chores in the barn and in the herb and oval box industry, or they assisted with a group project under the direction of project coordinator Tony Guerrero, such as restoring the fence in the front of the Meeting House and Ministry Shop. In the afternoon, the artists were free to pursue their own activities, artistic or otherwise. Adam Fuss built a darkroom in the Trustees’ Office, and Chen Zhen chose to communicate with the Shakers by drawing each of their portraits in pastel, included as part of his *My Diary in Shaker Village*.

Artists followed the ordered existence of Sabbathday Lake. They lived adjacent to the Shakers in the Trustees’ Office. Breakfast and lunch were shared together in the Dwelling House where the Shakers live, and on Mondays, the artists, organizers and Shakers would come together for dinner. These eating rituals punctuated days filled with work, and they provided the summer with a constant rhythm. So, too, did participation in worship. Artists attended the daily morning prayer, the Sunday service, and Wednesday night prayers as well. On Thursday evening, the groups came together for a weekly Meeting for Conversation, a 19th-century tradition that was revived for the summer collaboration. These sessions provided an open, honest forum for intense discussions of theology, work, art, and gender.

Many of the artists felt deeply influenced by this structure of everyday life. Its complex simplicity engendered a more intense registering of time, which, as Kazumi Tanaka observed, seemed to pass “more carefully” at the Village. Samore felt, too, that the structure allowed the less important things, the distractions which too readily plaque secular city dwellers, to fall away. Domenico de Clario hoped to bring “some small continuity of the structure of this life” to his life after the Shakers.

This experience of everyday life with the Shakers is the subject of Tanaka’s *Communion*, an installation which distills the artist’s memory of meals in the Shaker dining room. The clock’s watchful presence conveys the peaceful regularity of that ritual. The table’s individual plates are supported by the tension of water, with a placidity that evokes her experience of the clean, ordered passage of time. Twelve framed drawings, part of the artist’s journal, complete the room. Made of liquid coffee and milk, they have transformed as their organic materials changed and molded over time.

*Domenico de Clario’s The Divers Clothes Lying Empty* focuses, as well, on this ordered passage of time. The work consists of thirty small oil paintings, made each day during the month of June. For the artist, ‘the Shaker Village, the Lake, the fields and orchards, the sheep, the sky above it all, and the seven Shakers all exude a “Shakerness” as any “body” might exude its essential nature.’ Each day de Clario walked a spiral path of seven locations, designing the chakras, or energy-system of this body. The paintings were made in those locations, with the color that characterized its particular chakra. By painting blindfolded and with a Shaker basket over his head, de Clario could focus on the essence of each chakra, as he attempted to understand their Shakeress. In addition to the paintings, he also improvised daily, blindfolded at the piano, after meditating on that particular day’s chakra color. The sounds produced complemented the color used in the painting that day. And on the evening of the summer solstice, de Clario sat blindfolded at the piano again in the Meeting House, playing without interruption until the following morning. The daily playing and the solstice performance constitute the double CD that was produced as part of this project.

While these two artists have responded to the experience of everyday life at the Shaker Village, others have incorporated the artifacts of everyday life in works which encourage a reconsideration of things we have ceased to notice in our lives, much less consider. The materials used often seem unfamiliar to us because of their intense familiarity. Consider Mona Hatoum’s rubbings on wax, for
example, through which the shape of common domestic objects are recorded as fleeting tactile memories, or her spiked column, a once reassuring kitchen item now made threatening with the addition of protruding screws and bolts. In her Stay, Hatoum uses ordinary power tools as an artistic medium, to create the silhouetted, comforting trace of the accompanying crib's severe metal springs. Through the use of unexpected juxtapositions such as these, Hatoum's works highlights the process by which familiar objects become strange, are read differently, or understood differently.

Jane Sherlock's Cake Stand does this as well, focusing on the ambiguous, multiple connotations of everyday Shaker artifacts and objects, and the tension existing within them. The austere metal stand is a resting place for the working body and it evokes the rigid discipline with which the Shakers have long been associated in history, while the sponge cake that serves as its seat conveys the less celebrated aspects of Shaker life—warm domesticity, living companionship, and sweet celebration.

The Quiet in the Land began as a premise, a set of questions, and evolved into a wide variety of enriching individual experiences. By bridging two disparate cultures—those of the United Society of Believers and the contemporary art world—it sought to challenge the widespread belief that art and life exist in separate realms. The variety of works made in response to such experiences may suggest new methodologies for producing, viewing, and defining art, and encourage a reconsideration of its relevance.

France Morin

Biographical Notes

The Shaker community at Sabbathday Lake, Maine.

Sister Frances A. Carr was born in Lewiston, Maine in 1927 and became a Shaker in 1937.

Sister Marie Burgess was born in Rumford, Maine in 1920 and became a Shaker in 1939.

Sister June Carpenter was born in Boston, Mass. in 1938 and became a Shaker in 1989.

Sister Minnie Greene was born in South Portland in 1910 and became a Shaker in 1921.

Brother Arnold Hadd was born in Springfield, Mass. in 1956 and became a Shaker in 1978.

Brother Wayne Smith was born in Portland, Maine in 1963 and became a Shaker in 1979.

Brother Alastair Bate was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1964. He became a Shaker in 1995.

The Artists in Residence:

Janine Antoni was born in Freeport, Bahamas in 1964. She currently lives and works in New York as a sculptor, installation artist, and performance artist.

Domenico de Clario was born in Trieste, Italy in 1947. He has lived and worked in Australia since 1955 as a painter, installation artist, and performance artist.

Adam Fugg was born in 1961 in London. He lived and worked in England and Australia and moved to New York in 1982 where he now lives and works as a photographer.

Mona Hatoum was born in Beirut, Lebanon in 1952 and has worked in England since 1975 as a performance, video, and installation artist.

Sam Samore is a writer, photographer, and installation artist who lives and works in Europe and the U.S.

Jana Sterbak is born in Prague in 1955 and moved to Canada in 1968. A video and installation artist, she lives and works in Spain and Canada.

Kazumi Tanaka was born in Osaka, Japan, in 1962. She has lived and worked in New York since 1986 as a sculptor and installation artist.

Wolfgang Tillmans was born in 1968 in Remscheid, Germany, and has lived in Hamburg, New York, and London where he currently resides and works with photography.

Nari Ward was born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1963. He has lived and worked in New York since 1976 as a sculptor and installation artist.

Chen Zhen was born in Shanghai in 1956. He is an installation artist who has lived and worked in Paris since 1985.

France Morin is an internationally-known independent curator and art historian based in New York who has been active in the art world for the past twenty years. From 1989 to 1994 she was Senior Curator at The New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York where she organized many exhibitions and publications. From 1995 to 1997 she conceived The Quiet in the Land series and organized The Quiet in the Land: Everyday Life, contemporary art, and the Shakers.