

# SEASON FOUR

UNIVERSITY OF  
WATERLOO

University of Waterloo Art Gallery  
East Campus Hall 1239

Hours:  
Tuesday to Saturday 12:00–5:00 pm

Driving:  
263 Phillip Street, Waterloo, ON  
[uwaterloo.ca/map/index.php](http://uwaterloo.ca/map/index.php)

Mailing:  
200 University Avenue West  
Waterloo, ON Canada N2L 3G1

Contact:  
Ivan Jurakic, Director/Curator  
[ijurakic@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ijurakic@uwaterloo.ca)  
519.888.4567 ext. 36741  
[facebook.com/uwag.waterloo](https://www.facebook.com/uwag.waterloo)

[uwag.uwaterloo.ca](http://uwag.uwaterloo.ca)



### Behind the High Grass

Soft Turns is the creative partnership of Sarah Jane Gorlitz and Wojciech Olejnik. After finding a post-war travel book by Czech travellers and filmmakers Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund at a Berlin flea market, they were inspired to use the contents of the book as a means to explore the social, historical and political upheavals of the period.<sup>1</sup> Little known outside of the Czech Republic, the book itself, with its missing pages and evocative sepia images was a cypher: an inventory of readymade images and ideas that the artists could appropriate for their collaborative production of stop-motion animation.

Stop-motion animation is Soft Turns' principal medium, and a laborious, time-consuming process. Animation is essentially an assembly of static images edited together sequentially to create perceptual continuity. Traditional film runs at a speed of 24 frames-per-second (fps). To achieve various degrees of motion, the artists alternately shoot their videos at 24fps, 12fps or as little as 6fps. While digital technology makes this form of animation less cumbersome, its unique limitations are central to their practice.

*Behind the High Grass* is made up of several short animations based on images either found in the book (*solitary man with nature*, shot at 6 fps) or filmed on location to mimic particular scenes from the book (*P-19720*, shot at 12 fps). These short animations are grounded within an installation context that includes readymade artifacts and sculptural elements, including a set of four triangular display racks that mimic ones found in a museum dedicated to Hanzelka and Zikmund.<sup>2</sup> The image of a futuristic car is a recurring motif. *P-19720* was the license plate of the iconic silver Tatra 87 passenger vehicle that Hanzelka and Zikmund drove during their epic journey across Africa, South and Central America from 1947-1950. Ultimately, they visited 44 countries and travelled over 110,000 kilometres.<sup>3</sup>

The parallels between the travels and research of Hanzelka and Zikmund and those of Gorlitz and Olejnik are intentional. The artists follow in their predecessors' footsteps, at least on a conceptual level. They freely reference the book's contents, the style of the museum display and the idea of a grand undertaking. Though they have never been to Africa or South America, they have travelled extensively throughout Europe. They did not have access to a vintage Tatra 87, so they constructed a scale model of the dashboard to use as a cinematic prop for their video *P-19720*, which

### Artist Biography

Soft Turns (Sarah Jane Gorlitz and Wojciech Olejnik) have been collaborating on stop-motion and video installation since 2006. Olejnik (MFA University of Waterloo) and Gorlitz (MFA Malmö Art Academy) have received support from the Edstrand Foundation, the Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, and Canada Council for the Arts; including the 2008 Joseph Stauffer Prize and a 2013 Paris Residency. Recent and upcoming exhibitions include Centre Clark (Montréal), Southern Exposure (San Francisco), Foundation 3.14 (Bergen), Greusslich Contemporary (Berlin), 18th Videobrasil (São Paulo) and Modern Fuel (Kingston). Soft Turns are currently based in Toronto.

[www.softturns.com](http://www.softturns.com)

### List of Works

*solitary man with nature*, 2011, stop-motion animation, 0:45 loop

*P-19720*, 2013, stop-motion animation, 3:42 loop

*behind the high grass*, 2013, sculptural installation, various materials, dimensions variable

they shot in Bergen, Norway. Hanzelka and Zikmund represent kindred spirits, modern explorers that the artists channel through their own practice.

The use of stop motion is fitting for a project predicated on a book that has been taken apart page by page. Whether by accident or intent, translation or removal, the missing pages represent a gap between what is there and what is not, much like the breaks between film frames. Spaces in between that are at once absence and continuum. Soft Turns mine this interregnum as a means to generate contingency and possibility. *Behind the High Grass* is a documentary fragment that celebrates a shared journey of exploration, adventure and discovery.

— Ivan Jurakic

1. The book is titled *Südamerika; zwischen Paraná und Rio de la Plata*, a German translation from the original Czech.  
2. The Museum of Southwest Moravia located in Zlín, closed its doors in 2006.  
3. <http://www.czech.cz/en/Discover-CZ/Facts-about-the-Czech-Republic/Present-day-celebrities/Czech-travellers---Part-3>.

January 9–March 8, 2014

Gallery One

**C. Wells**

Place and Space (REDUX)

Gallery Two

**Soft Turns**

Behind the High Grass





## Place and Space (REDUX)

For better or worse, North Americans have a symbiotic relationship with their cars. And yet, despite all of the time spend on the road we rarely ever consider the elegant lines laid down to demarcate lanes of traffic and establish right of way. The ubiquitous white (highway) or yellow (city) lines sprayed directly atop concrete and tarmac are just *there*. C. Wells has adopted these line markers as a central tenet of his practice, his life’s work. He wants us to be aware of the ubiquitous median strip as more than a mere line on the road but as a topographical code that dominates the landscape.

His fixation has its roots in a road safety innovation first demonstrated in Trenton, Michigan in 1911 by one Edward N. Hines, a member of the Wayne County Road Commission. Hines conceived of the idea while on an inspection trip of nearby roads. Apparently, as he approached a sharp curve along the Huron River he noticed a streak of some “white liquid material in about the center of the pavement”. Accounts vary whether the liquid was from a leaking concrete motor or spilt milk from a delivery truck.<sup>1</sup> Regardless, his fortuitous observation led him to devise the dividing stripe that would eventually proliferate to roads and highways across North America before being adopted internationally after World War II.

Wells has researched his subject exhaustively. He revisited the original site in Trenton—where he repainted a section of road marker by hand in 2001—and has been to the archives at the Henry Ford Museum in nearby Dearborn to track down original documents. Beyond his obvious historical interest in Hines’ work, Wells situates himself as an intellectual labourer. While his work addresses aspects of Abstraction and Minimalism, he deploys the utility and limited palette of the line marker as a readymade stand-in for progress, industrialization and the promises of 20th century Modernism. In this regard, the line marker represents the spread of urbanization in the postwar period following the construction of the Interstate highway system in the United States as well as the Trans-Canada highway. On the flip side, this same dividing line represents the cleaving of urban neighbourhoods and rural communities to accommodate new expressways and urban planning schemes that ultimately failed in their promise to deliver affordable housing and good paying jobs to inner cities and rural areas. When the rubber hit the road in cities like Detroit in the late 1960s, the blacktop led straight to the suburbs. What followed was white flight, urban sprawl, hollowed out downtown cores and the collapse of manufacturing. They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.

Hines innovation could not have foreseen this. It was a brilliant design solution to nascent concerns about vehicular traffic and road safety that has proven to be a remarkably adaptable system of road marking for over 100 years.<sup>2</sup> Wells gets this, but he also understands that Hines invention is best appreciated as both blessing and curse. He posits Hines as the progenitor-inventor of what may well be one of the most underrated universal systems to evolve out of Modernism: a form of topographical mapping that practically encompasses every landmass on the planet. To Wells, the ubiquitous white and yellow median stripe encapsulates the triumph of urbanization as well as the resultant social and environmental upheavals of the last century.

Wells approaches line marker as both subject matter and material. He deploys it as a purposefully machine-like markmaking vocabulary, one that is at once familiar but upon reflection reveals complexity and nuance. Wells’ works take the form of paintings, performances as well as written documents, and much of his recent work can best be described as assisted readymades, in which he alters or edits an existing object or image. In fact, one can readily extent this description to the entirety of his practice, including the paintings, which although done by hand are done so in a mechanical manner. For instance, the width of each line is always 4 inches, the same as the width of a median strip applied on a road surface based on guidelines established by the U.S. Highway Act of 1956. His palette is limited by these same rules: white and yellow to demarcate, blue and red for purposes such as handicap zones, and black to erase.

*1/4 mile for Edward Hines, (white), 317 passes* and *1/4 mile for Edward Hines, (yellow), 187 passes* are just what their titles suggest. Layers of white and yellow line marker hand painted exactly 317 and 187 times respectively. If you can imagine stretching these lines horizontally each would equal an uninterrupted quarter mile line on the road. Wells approaches painting as an action, a verb, suggesting a conceptual link between his approach and that of artists such as Richard Serra or Sol Lewitt. Embracing the idea of process each worked in repetitive modes that allowed them to produce art in an almost mechanical manner following a set of guidelines or rules. Wells shares a similar no nonsense approach and rigour about his work as these conceptualist predecessors. But his dedication to line marker is uniquely his own. *1/4 mile for Edward Hines* represents a perfectly self-contained artmaking system that at once represents painting as process, acts as an homage and functions as a conceptual task that has been completed.

His recent works make use of existing artifacts as readymade surfaces for markmaking. *CENSURE SERIES* appropriates found and secondhand landscape paintings and period artifacts that the artist has modified, including *This Side Green, This Green Side* and *Who’s Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue*. The original landscapes represent romantic notions of what we wish landscape to be: idyllic, pastoral, and rural. Wells markmaking obliterates these images with rough burrs of black line marker, purposefully obscuring the countryside with the painterly equivalent of skid marks. The centerpiece, *Western Scenic Views* features a 1940s billboard image over which the artist has similarly overlaid black line marker to evoke the act of burning rubber. The *CENSURE SERIES* suggests our predilection for destroying indigenous environments as we transform them. *Western Scenic Views* boldly reiterates this sad fact, spoiling the picturesque while leaving the bland smiling face of the gas station attendant unscathed looking forward to a better tomorrow.

In *FOLK SERIES*, Wells transforms tires into modern emblems. *Streets of Laredo* and *Open Country* feature propped up radial tires. In a clever reversal, line marker paint has been applied directly to each tread—white to *Streets of Laredo* and yellow to *Open Country*—suggesting that each has driven over freshly laid median. Nestled within the rubber rim of *Streets of Laredo* sits a vintage Aerolux bulb illuminating a delicately glowing rose-shaped filament. *Open Country* features a brass sheath of wheat growing out of the tire cavity. This juxtaposition of muscularity and fragility complements Wells’ project while evoking a kind of roadside iconography. In stepping beyond pure process, the *CENSURE* and *FOLK SERIES* propose an ersatz museum, opening Wells narrative up to reveal a poignant sense of loss at its core that may well be the closest that his work comes to sentiment.

Wells is no soft touch. *Place and Space* is only the most recent facet of an ongoing project he has been doggedly pursuing for nearly two decades. Edward Hines. Line marker. 1911. In that century gap, we have gone from that first awkward hand painted median strip in Michigan to an interconnected grid of roads, highways, concessions and boulevards that simultaneously define and mar the contemporary landscape from the largest city to the most remote outback. Receding white and yellow lines demarcate where we have been, and potentially where we are going, like transmissions on a visual frequency that we have been taught to respond to instinctively, yet very rarely asked to consider consciously. Wells may well be one of our finest code-breakers.

— Ivan Jurakic

## List of Works

*1/4 mile for Edward Hines (yellow), 187 passes, 2010*  
Line marker paint on canvas, custom pedestal,  
213 x 38 x 10 cm

*1/4 mile for Edward Hines (white), 317 passes, 2010*  
Line marker paint on canvas, custom pedestal,  
127 x 50 x 8 cm

*MAP (All Roads Lead to Rome), 2011*  
Line marker on canvas, 208 cm diameter

*CENSURE SERIES: Mapology, 2012*  
*CENSURE SERIES: This Side Green, This Green Side, 2012*  
*CENSURE SERIES: Who’s Afraid of Red, Yellow, Blue, 2012*  
Line marker on found canvas mounted behind Plexiglas,  
92 x 61 x 8 cm each

## Artist Biography

C. Wells is a Hamilton-based artist and has been exhibiting aspects of his ongoing line marker project in solo and group exhibitions across Canada for nearly two decades. He is the recipient of various grants and awards including the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council for the Arts. The works in *Place and Space (REDUX)* were originally

*CENSURE SERIES: Western Scenic Views, 2012–13*  
Line marker on billboard poster paper, 274 x 610 cm

*FOLK SERIES: Open Country, 2012*  
Line marker on tire, ornamental wheat sheaf,  
76 cm diameter

*FOLK SERIES: Streets of Laredo, 2012*  
Line marker on tire, Aerolux bulb, 76 cm diameter

*FOLK SERIES: ATLAS, 2013*  
Line marker on tire, altered tire rack,  
127 x 127 x 76 cm

*PANOPTICON, 2013*  
Line marker on canvas, 208 cm diameter

produced as part of the first artist-in-residence program at 270 Sherman in Hamilton, Ontario in 2013. The artist would like to thank Ivan Jurakic, Gareth Lichty, Peter Crosthwaite and the staff at 270 Sherman. This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Ronald Wells.  
[www.cwells.com](http://www.cwells.com)

- Center Line on Pavement*: From the Files of the Board of Wayne County Road Commissioners, Detroit, Michigan. Documentation provided by C. Wells.
- Fittingly, 100 years after the application of the first line marking in Trenton, Michigan, Edward Hines was recognized for his innovation and was posthumously awarded the Paul Mijksenaar Design for Function Award in 2011. <http://paulmijksenaaraward.com/2011/10/24>.

Image details (from left to right): *CENSURE SERIES: Western Scenic Views; 1/4 mile for Edward Hines, (white), 317 passes; FOLK SERIES: Streets of Laredo; CENSURE SERIES: Western Scenic Views*. All images courtesy of the artist.