

# ADAD HANNAH

## THREE GENERATIONS (KODIAK ART CLUB, 1953)



April 24 to June 8, 2014  
Koffler Gallery  
Curator: Mona Filip



**Don't Look Now, But your Burnt Sienna Is Showing!**

# Artist Colony Formed On Kodiak Island

Regulations might frown on beards and berets but Kodiak's Art Club is doing a big business in applying paints, pastels, and charcoal on canvas at the Kodiak Art Club.

Over 40 sailors, dependents and civilian employees of the Naval Station are plying their artistic hobby in the recently formed art club.

According to Paul Bond, club president who is assisted by Jerry Har-

sailors can paint pictures besides painting the town. Everyone associated with the Station is welcome to drop down to the Hobby Shop and take part in the club's work.

Individual instruction is the main theme of the club. Paul, Jerry and Herb are present at the classes to help embryo artists and those further along, either learn how or develop their technique. Classes are designed to solve perspective, composition, and technique through

the drawing of still life, photos, and figure drawing.

At the present time Artist Bond hopes to get the fundamentals of art behind his students so that they can go afield when the days get longer and capture some records of landscapes and seascapes about the Naval Station.

Classes with instruction are held on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings from 7:30 to 9:00 p. m.

On Monday evening Paul Bond

instructs in "Fine Art" which includes work in the medium of oils, water color, charcoal and pastel. On Tuesday evening Herb Andrews instructs in "Free Pen Rendering" and basic fundamentals of cartooning. The classes which are held on Wednesday evening by Jerry Har-

ness consist of instruction in oil painting, pencil sketching, and fundamentals of art to help those who wish to paint merely for the relaxing enjoyment that it brings.





# ADAD HANNAH: THREE GENERATIONS (KODIAK ART CLUB, 1953)

We were there a few years, so I decided to paint my children ... I started with my older daughter because she was a very beautiful little girl. Everyone said how beautiful she was so I painted her ... And, she posed for me.... I liked the way it was coming out. And, even to this day, it looks very much like the way she looked. And the way she looks now. Well, I tried to get the colours of her. Her hair, and her face and the clothing she wore. And I had the colours and I mixed them until I got the colour that I thought was good. And then I went ahead with it. But it got to the point where I didn't feel there was anything else to do. I had her nose out and her mouth on. And her clothes were there. So that was the end of the painting...

— Sally Gross, age 93 (Albany, New York, 2014)

Vancouver-based artist Adad Hannah, whose video-based installations are exhibited internationally, has developed a new body of work for the Koffler Gallery. *Three Generations (Kodiak Art Club, 1953)* examines the complexity of family relationships, the veracity of photography, and the way in which photographs help shape memory and identity. For the first time, he collaborates with a family member, his mother, Barbara Txi Hannah, also an artist and a subject of this familial investigation.

At first glance, Hannah's dramatically staged scenes appear as still photographs, but are actually live moments captured by video. The tableau vivant, which translates from French as "living picture," was popularized in the 19th century when costumed actors would dress up and pose, referencing historical or religious narratives and famous paintings. Inherent in the tableau vivant is the spectacle of the artifice as the models or actors hold their pose for an extended period of time. Photographers became interested in the tableau vivant in the second half of the 20th century. At first, it was an attempt to capture the heightened drama of painting but later it became more of an effort to challenge the very act of looking – unnerving one's sense of time and place. The beauty and drama of the artifice and its simultaneous deconstruction is central to Hannah's practice. Perhaps this can be traced back to the artist's childhood – his parents were professional performers – and the breakdown of the fourth wall was an inherent part of the spectacle.

Coming of age artistically in Vancouver, Hannah was immersed in the Vancouver School of photoconceptualism, most notably the work of Jeff Wall and Stan Douglas, whose photographs (in very different ways) involve the meticulous staging of perplexing narratives. Undoubtedly, the foundation of Hannah's work – carefully planned productions within well-rooted conceptual frameworks – grew from this artistic ferment. However, Hannah's use of video and the viewer's ability to poke holes in the artifice became important to his practice early on, setting him apart.

At the heart of the Koffler exhibition is a photograph taken in 1953 on an American military base in Kodiak, Alaska where the artist's grandfather was stationed as a merchant marine. Hannah's grandmother, Sally Gross – the woman at her easel in the foreground – had joined an art club on the base. In the photograph, which appeared in the local newspaper, *The Kodiak Bear*, the young sailor's wife, at age 31, is posed painting a portrait of her 8-year-old daughter who patiently sits centrally positioned in the background. This photograph has been part of the family's "photo album" since its inception and its story is central to the family's history – a narrative with the making of art at its core.



A large-scale video projection of this restaged moment is front and centre upon entering the Koffler Gallery. The viewer experiences an “aha moment” when it becomes evident that it is a video and not a still photograph – the little girl blinks, the mother’s arm quivers. Consistent with his recent work, Hannah’s restaging of this moment is a highly orchestrated and collaborative production. Models were hired to play the roles of his grandmother and mother. Similar clothes were purchased and fabricated, and a replica of the 1953 studio in Alaska was built. Just as his grandmother directed his 8-year-old mother to hold her pose 60 years before, Hannah, in 2013, directs these actors to recreate the moment, breathing life into his family’s “foundation story.”

Behind the video projection is the physical reconstruction of the studio in Kodiak. With its placement directly behind the projection, it’s as though one can see “behind the curtain” to fully comprehend the re-enactment. The set is empty, save for the clothes worn by the models and a copy of the original painting (in another twist, this version was painted by Barbara Txi Hannah for the exhibition). On the gallery’s back wall, the original 1953 painting hangs prominently, completing this eerie trinity. The yellowing newspaper article and dog-eared copies of the photograph occupy a nearby wall display. This repetition and mirroring of images, a device commonly employed by Hannah in his videos, breaks down one’s confidence in the very concept of a personal past. Is one’s sense of self merely a construct made from fragments of memories, told stories and snapshots?

By repeatedly exploring the multiplicity of these images throughout *Three Generations*, the prominence of the “original” and the status of the “copy” also break down. In digitization, the term “generation” refers to how many times an image has been reproduced from a descendent copy of the original source image. What is lost in translation as we move further away from the point of origin, and what is gained with each new version?

This multiplicity of imagery is further explored in a pair of matching vitrines where Hannah has installed two identical sets of photos. For this project, mother and son mined the family archive, discovering multiple copies of the same snapshot in the process. The copies have histories of their own – packed and unpacked, sent to and returned by various relatives as they journey through their lives – their meanings shifting over time and place. Here, the doubles are reunited, coming full circle in these twin cases. Removed from the domestic setting of a photo album or frame and encased in museum vitrines, these archetypal family photos are elevated, carrying more weight and implying more “truth.”

Along the north wall of the gallery, Hannah shifts focus to the present with a documentary-style video installation of interviews with his grandmother, now in her 90s and living in a seniors’ home in Albany, New York. Here, the three generations of artists collide: Adad Hannah, his mother Barbara, and her mother Sally Gross. A montage of video stills is overlaid with audio of Sally’s voice, finally supplying a narrative to this family’s story. However, there is a purposeful disconnect between the audio and the video “stills” – Hannah and his mother awkwardly hold poses as Sally, dressed in colourful senior-leisure wear, is at times animated and at other times, asleep. The purposefully choppy editing results in a disjointedness, a further unraveling of the linear narrative. Hannah blurs objectivity with subjectivity and memory with reality as he shuffles story, photo, painting and newspaper article, again and again.



















The mining of the family archive led Hannah's mother, Barbara, to create a series of ten black-and-white collages of family photos. On view on the south wall of the gallery, each one explores a different theme: the family's years as performers on the streets of Europe, Barbara's wedding, Adad through the years in various clown faces, earlier photos from Alaska, a young Barbara. These charming vignettes are assemblages, this artist's opportunity to construct her own version of the family narrative amidst her mother's and son's.

In Judaism, the expression "L'dor va dor," which translates from the Hebrew as "from generation to generation," is a command to pass on stories and beliefs from one generation to the next. Through the years, this concept has been interpreted as the importance of passing on one's cultural heritage to the next generation. *Three Generations* celebrates and codifies the moment when Sally Gross becomes an artist – instilling in her daughter, and eventually her grandson, this artistic impulse. It is a visual fulfillment of "L'dor va dor" showing three generations flourishing as art makers.

With *Three Generations* (Kodiak Art Club, 1953), Hannah set out to further explore the parameters of the photograph: how meaning is produced, how the artifice of the tableau vivant affects this process, and how layers of reproduction complicate viewing. In the course of re-animating a pivotal period from his own family's history, he has activated the story within this contemporary moment, permitting new understandings about himself and his artistic impulse, his relationship with his mother and grandmother, as well as their relationship with one another.

## Dara Solomon

---

**Adad Hannah** was born in New York in 1971, spent his childhood in Israel and England, and moved to Vancouver in the early 1980s. He currently lives and works in Vancouver. He has exhibited widely on the international scene, including the Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art (Seoul 2013), Museo Tamayo (Mexico City 2012), Prague Biennial 5 (2011), 5th International Video Art Biennial at the Israeli Center for Digital Art (Holon 2011), Canadian Biennial at the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa 2011), Australian Centre for Photography (Sydney 2010), Liverpool Biennial (2010), Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum (Ridgefield, Connecticut 2010), Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (2008, 2009), Zendai MoMA (Shanghai 2009), Vancouver Art Gallery (2007), Ikon Gallery (Birmingham 2006), 4th Seoul International Media Art Biennale (2006), La Casa Encendida (Madrid 2006) and Viper Basel (2004). Hannah won the Toronto Images Festival Installation/New Media Award in 2004, and the Bogdanka Poznanović Award at Videomedija 8. He has produced works at museums including the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, National Gallery of Canada, Vancouver Art Gallery, Rodin Gallery (Seoul), and Prado Museum (Madrid). His works are in many public collections, and he is represented by Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain in Montreal and Equinox Gallery in Vancouver.

**Dara Solomon** is currently the Director of the Ontario Jewish Archives, Blankenstein Family Heritage Centre (OJA). During her tenure, which started in 2012, she has expanded access to the collection in print, online, and other media. Prior to joining the OJA, Solomon was the Curator at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco. She also served in the curatorial department of the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum for six years. Solomon holds an MA in Arts Administration from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BA from the University of Toronto.



## Image credits

Cover: Adad Hannah, *Three Generations (Kodiak Art Club, 1953)* (installation detail), photo: Toni Hafkenscheid | Inside cover, top: Newspaper article from *The Kodiak Bear*, April 3, 1953 | Inside cover, bottom: Adad Hannah, *Sally in Albany* (video still, cropped), 2010, HD video, 5:36 min | Pages 3-4: Adad Hannah, *Three Generations (Kodiak Art Club, 1953)* (installation detail), photo: Toni Hafkenscheid | Pages 5-6, top: Adad Hannah, *Family Archive – Doubles* (installation detail), 2014, two vitrines, two sets of family photographs, photo: Toni Hafkenscheid | Pages 5-6, bottom left: Adad Hannah, *Interview: Kodiak Art Club* (video still, cropped), 2014, HD video, 5:21 min | Pages 5-6, bottom right: Barbara Txi Hannah, *Autobiographical Collage, The Family and the Extraordinary Clown Band*, 2014, cut and collaged family photographs.



# KOFFLER GALLERY

Ongoing support for Koffler Gallery exhibitions and education programs is generously provided by:



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada

The Koffler Centre of the Arts acknowledges the support of:



## KOFFLER FOUNDATION



Design: Tony Hewer | Printing: Incredible Printing | Editing: Shannon Anderson  
Publication to the exhibition Adad Hannah: *Three Generations (Kodiak Art Club, 1953)*  
Presented by the Koffler Gallery | April 24 to June 8, 2014

# koffler

centre of the arts

Koffler Gallery | Koffler Centre of the Arts

Artscape Youngplace | 180 Shaw Street, Suite 104-105 | Toronto, Ontario M6J 2W5

647.925.0643 | [kofflergallery@kofflerarts.org](mailto:kofflergallery@kofflerarts.org) | [kofflerarts.org](http://kofflerarts.org)