Ghost in the Bronco

By Sean Weisgerber

Countless Visions
Jason Lujan
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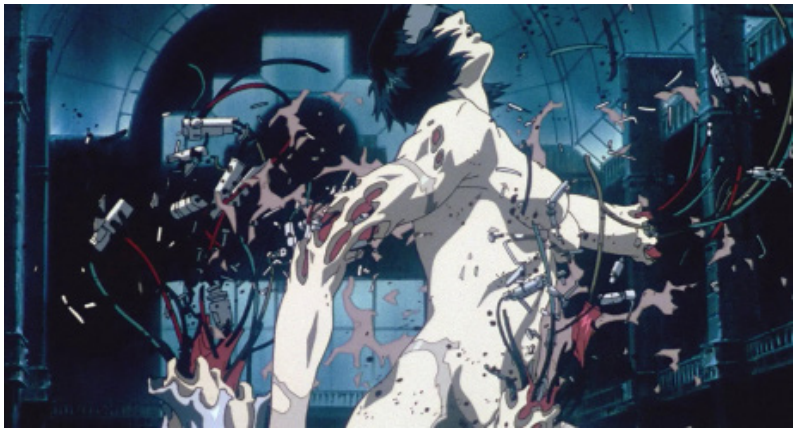
Picture yourself idling on the shoulder of a sprawling Texas highway, the midday heat distorting the horizon. The air hangs thick with sun-scorched pavement, gasoline fumes, and the lingering dampness of morning dew on the brush beyond the asphalt. A glossy speck emerges in the distance, growing larger as it nears—then, suddenly, the shape fractures, its reflection stretching and distorting into a shimmering mirage. A moment later, a cactus-grey Ford Bronco bursts through the illusion, snapping into stark clarity. It slows briefly beside a weathered roadside building, dust curling at its wheels. From the driver's seat, a figure steps out, moving with deliberate urgency as he checks his cargo—objects carefully chosen for the road ahead. Inside, propped among them, a sign: ***Countless Visions***. Then, without hesitation, he gets back behind the wheel and roars onward, folding into the wavering horizon.

This scene launches us into Jason Lujan's conceptual framework for his Forest City Gallery exhibition—a deceptively simple premise built around what he could physically transport in his 2024 Ford Bronco. Yet this practical constraint quickly unfolds into a meditation on geography, culture, and migration. Like Lujan himself, the Bronco was built and assembled south of the border. Fittingly, the specific Bronco model Lujan owns—Big Bend—shares its name with the national park located less than 100 miles from his birthplace. Born in Marfa, Texas—Donald Judd's infamous modernist sanctuary—Lujan carries its layered history within his artistic DNA. Before Judd transformed the town in the 1970s, Marfa operated as a military outpost, home to Fort D.A. Russell and the nearby Fort Davis. And long before colonization—and still today—these lands remain the unceded territories of the nomadic Jumanos, Mescalero Apache, and Lipan Apache peoples.[1] Marfa exists in a perpetual cycle of adaptation, famous for its stark desert vistas, mysterious "Marfa Lights," and enigmatic artistic interventions. Thirty-seven miles outside of town stands *Prada Marfa* (2005), Elmgreen & Dragset's installation on US Route 90—an unopenable luxury storefront rising from the desert floor like a one-building ghost town: meticulously crafted yet hollow, appearing authentic while lacking a functioning interior.

This push and pull between surface and substance pulses through Lujan's practice. Now based in Toronto by way of New York, he navigates cross-cultural aesthetics, fostering layered dialogues of exchange and adaptation.

Elmgreen & Dragset, *Prada Marfa*, 2005. Photo: © Shelby Cohron



Major Motoko Kusanagi in the 1995 anime feature *Ghost in the Shell*. Photo: © Manga/Anchor

His work often questions notions of authenticity, exploring how cultural identities are constructed, borrowed, and reinterpreted. This tension finds a striking parallel in *Prada Marfa*—a pristine façade of consumer culture that operates as a simulacrum, presenting the illusion of commerce while remaining permanently inaccessible. It interrogates whether authenticity can persist when a brand exists solely as an empty signifier. This same concern resonates with Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), which questions what remains of the self when bodies become vessels for transplanted consciousness. Its protagonist, Major Motoko Kusanagi, wonders whether her "ghost" (soul) retains its authenticity within a manufactured "shell" (body). Much like Kusanagi's cyborg body and *Prada Marfa*'s hollow storefront, Lujan's sculptures and paintings exist at the intersection of vessel and essence, form and meaning. Rather than merely blending cultural influences, Lujan engages these tensions to probe how identity is formed—whether authenticity lies in its origins or in its transformations.

Materially, Lujan's hybridity manifests through the integration of mechanical processes—3D scanning, digital output, screen printing—with traditional hand-painted elements and readymade objects. This constant dialogue between digital and tactile, mass-produced and handmade, found and created, reflects the tensions inherent in hybrid identities. In *Abandon the Concept of Authenticity*, he confronts this question explicitly. A readymade LED fluorescent fixture displays the work's provocative title, yet

the fixture has been stripped of its power supply—its function severed, its ability to project its message compromised. Here, Lujan challenges us directly: How is authenticity constructed? How is it undermined? And ultimately, who holds the authority to decide? Lujan unravels the concept of authenticity as a fluid negotiation between form, perception, and power.

This strategy infuses every aspect of *Countless Visions*, where Lujan's sculptural assemblages and paintings accumulate in sedimentary layers, inviting dissection at their seams. His work fosters incisive personal connections while engaging viewers in an ongoing translation process. Lujan, mirroring his art, remains deliberately enigmatic, never allowing full access and resisting interpretation through any single cultural lens. This refusal to be categorized isn't evasion but operates as a strategic means of maintaining openness—where information transmission is limited by our abilities (as viewers) to translate, compelling us into a space of perpetual reinterpretation.

Wild Places, one of the exhibition's earliest works, embodies this complex negotiation. Constructed from repurposed cardboard boxes screened with Japanese kanji characters translating to "MUJI" (the iconic Japanese retail chain meaning "No-Brand Quality Goods"), the piece emerged during Lujan's time in Brooklyn. He transforms these commercial remnants into a fragmented composition where diverse linguistic and cultural systems collide and weave. At the bottom, he screen-prints his own Chiricahua Apache

Left: Jason Lujan, *Abandon the Concept of Authenticity*, 2021.
Right: Jason Lujan, *Wild Places*, 2012. Photo: © LF Documentation

Jason Lujan, *Fata Morgana*. 2024. Photo: © LF Documentation.

patterning, while above, an Apache helicopter appears to take flight—visually binding military symbolism to his heritage.[2] "I use pattern as a stand-in for language," Lujan explains, noting how the geometric pattern functions simultaneously as "a Southwest Native pattern and a military Wilkinson style." [3] (Norman Wilkinson invented dazzle camouflage to be applied to military boats in WWI and WWII[4]). This deliberate interplay—between the appropriated term "Apache" and the symbolic language of pattern—fractures meaning, destabilizing fixed associations and revealing the slipperiness of cultural signifiers.

Lujan's painting *Fata Morgana* presents a central form suspended within a rectangular frame, its contours shifting between interpretations: is it a hide stripped from a carcass or an ancient map we lack the tools to decipher? The work resists categorization, compelling viewers to circle its prismatic form in search of an elusive entry point. Like the optical phenomenon it is named after, the painting evokes a Fata Morgana—a superior mirage in which bending light distorts and reshapes the landscape below. This conceptual framework underscores Lujan's engagement with perception, materializing and dissolving before our eyes, leaving us suspended between recognition and uncertainty.

Throughout *Countless Visions*, Lujan's objects function as vessels of translation, bridging past and present, place and displacement, tradition and reinvention. Each piece asks us to consider what lingers from its original form and what shifts in the process of adaptation. Like *Prada*

Marfa in the desert, the Bronco on the highway, or a Fata Morgana wavering on the horizon, Lujan's works remain in motion—arriving from elsewhere, carrying complex histories, and unfolding into new possibilities. His exhibition, *Countless Visions*, transcends its physical limits, transforming into a mobile archive of cultural intersections—a nomadic gallery where personal narratives, histories, and identities collide and intertwine, contained, somehow, inside the shell of a Bronco.

Endnotes

1] Native Land Digital. Native Land. Accessed 28 Feb. 2025, https://native-land.ca.

2] Misra, Tanvi. "Native American Artists Reclaim Images That Represent Them." NPR, 31 Aug. 2014, https://www.mprnews.org/story/2014/08/31/native-american-artists-reclaim-images-that-represent-them.

3] Lujan, Jason. Text message to the author. 23 Feb. 2025.

4] "Dazzle Camouflage." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, Wikimedia Foundation, [date of last edit]. Accessed 3 Mar. 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dazzle_camouflage.

Bios & Acknowledgements

Jason Lujan is originally from Marfa, Texas, and lives in Toronto. He is an Assistant Professor at OCAD U and one of two artists behind Native Art Department International (NADI), a project in collaboration with Maria Hupfield. As an artist, he creates things that realize his lived environment, connecting it to larger global experiences to generate new meanings.

Sean Weisgerber is an artist originally from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and lives in Toronto. His work centres on the nexus of art and commerce with an interest in how art and labour are commodified. His work has been shown in solo exhibitions at Arsenal Contemporary (New York), Blouin Division (Montreal/Toronto), Open Studio Contemporary Printmaking Centre (Toronto) and Wil Aballe Art Projects (Vancouver). He has had work included in group exhibitions at The Plumb (Toronto), The Foreman Gallery at Bishop's University (Sherbrooke), The New Gallery (Calgary), Ace Art (Winnipeg), AKA Artist-Run (Saskatoon), and the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa) as a finalist in the RBC Painting Competition. He is represented by Blouin Division (Montreal/Toronto).

FCG

Forest City Gallery (FCG) is an artist-run centre founded on artistic autonomy with a commitment to excellence in programming exhibitions and events that reflect and address recent developments in cultural production. FCG serves to foster and support contemporary art, promoting dialogue among local, regional, and international arts communities. FCG represents artists of all disciplines and career levels with a focus on emerging artists and practices.

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Forest City Gallery is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape, Huron-Wendat and Attawandaron peoples, which has been a site of human activity for over 10,000 years. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nations communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Forest City Gallery acknowledges the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers, and we acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples endure in Canada.

To acknowledge this traditional territory is to recognize its longer history, one predating the establishment of the earliest European colonies. We also acknowledge the colonial frameworks within which Forest City Gallery operates and the need to identify and remove barriers on an ongoing basis.

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