

Video Proposal

48 Abell Street

Ice Rink

The following text is a proposal for a video documenting a lone ice skater gliding across a frozen rink that existed for the day of January 15, 2012, at the bottom of the earthen pit left after the demolition of the 48 Abell Street

factory building. This landmark had stood for 124 years on the other side of the plywood hoarding where this written proposal is now installed. Since December 2011, I had been monitoring the site daily, excitedly observing the groundwater and rain slowly filling the void left after demolition

and excavation.

Experience told me that several days of rain followed by a sharp drop in temperature without snow could result in perfect ice skating conditions on this shallow pond. As I live in one of the buildings that border the site, I wanted to both skate on this 'backyard rink' and make a video

documenting it as a poignant moment in the site's redevelopment. On January 12, 2012, enough rain fell to cover the remaining dirt poking through the water's surface. On the evening of January 14, a cold snap plummeted temperatures to -12°C , quickly turning the pond into an ideal

rink that would last through the next day. I was unable to seize this brief opportunity to shoot the footage necessary for the video already taking shape in my mind.

Warmer temperatures and rain returned on January 16, melting the pristine expanse of skate-able ice. For several weeks I returned daily, hoping

for the return of the vanished ice rink and another chance to document it. The video I'd envisioned had acquired epic proportions and importance in my imagination. By the time freezing temperatures returned however, much of the accumulated pond water had evaporated resulting only in small

patches of ice broken up by larger areas of snow and dirt. Soon after, construction resumed on the site, rendering the "48 Abell Street Ice Rink" video forever unrealized and unrealizable. The video can now exist only in writing. This text constitutes my retrospective attempt to describe the

transitory moment the proposed video would have captured and rationalize its significance within the history of the site. The unrealizable "48 Abell Street Ice Rink" video outlined in this text focuses on an ice skater endlessly looping across an unusually situated frozen pond. The video is shot in a

documentary style
that uses only
available daylight, a
fixed focal length lens,
and in-camera sound.
The ice skater,
absorbed in graceful
motion, is unaware of
the presence of the
camera. Clips of her
continuous circuit,
which links corner to
corner to corner of the
L-shaped rink, are shot
from fifty-five

locations surrounding the rink. These clips are then edited into eight scenes that progressively ascend from ice level to the 18th storey balconies of neighboring buildings. The video's opening scene suggests an idyllic, rural rink. However, as the fixed focal length camera ascends, the skater becoming

smaller and smaller
and the in-camera
audio shifting from the
distinctive sound of
metal blades on ice to
the ambient noise of
the city, the hyper-
urbanity of the site is
revealed. The real
subject of the video is
not the fluid movement
of the ice skater but
rather the history of
48 Abell Street and its
location at the

epicenter of one of Toronto's most extensive development sites. The setting of the "48 Abell Street Ice Rink" video, in architectural terms, functions like a massive Roman amphitheater built to see and hear the ice skater at its center below. Structured accordingly, the video's provided

viewpoint
progressively ascends
the buildings
surrounding the rink
– climbing in Fibonacci
Series from floor 0
(below ground), to 1
(ground floor), and on
through floors 2, 3, 5,
8, 13, and 18 of the
Artscape Triangle
Lofts, the Westside
Gallery Lofts, The
Curve building, 180
Sudbury Street, the

Bohemian Embassy,
and 1155 Queen
Street West. At each
of these eight heights,
the camera
circumnavigates the
site, primarily from
these buildings'
balconies, in a
decreasing number of
longer video clips
edited together to
comprise eight
75-second long
scenes. As the video's

point-of-view and in-camera sound ascend, attention is drawn away from the dynamic action of the skater to an almost static aerial view of the development site. Each of the video's eight scenes shows the skater's full 75-second long circuit around the ice in three to twelve clips that range in length from 6

to 24 seconds.

Temporal continuity between these fifty-five clips, which jump from one camera position to another, is created by panning to keep the skater in the center of each shot and editing the video to reconstruct her continuous circuit around the ice. In plan view, the naturally formed rink is shaped

like the mirror image of a large puffy letter L, approximating the footprint of the last remaining sections of the 48 Abell factory building. The length and width of its longest section, running east to west, measures about 330 feet by 60 feet (1.65 times the length and 0.7 times the width of a regulation NHL

hockey rink). The shorter section of the L-shape is situated at the rink's eastern end, running north to south, and forms a cul-de-sac measuring about 70 by 80 feet. The ice skater's consistent circuitous route around the ice rink starts near the entrance to the Artscape Triangle Lofts at 38 Abell Street and arcs

diagonally to the rink's northwestern corner close to the Bohemian Embassy's main entrance. Then, she makes a wide 180-degree turn around the western end and arcs back towards the rink's northeastern corner. Once there, she turns 270 degrees and heads south into the rink's frozen cul-de-sac

near the Artscape Triangle Lofts. Cutting a wide U-turn along the perimeter, the skater then doubles back to repeat the circuit ad infinitum. Skating this approximately 300 metre-long circuit at a leisurely speed of 14.4 km/h takes 75 seconds. In terms of audio, the "48 Abell Street Ice Rink" video

opens at ice level to the unmistakable sounds of steel skate blades cutting across a frozen surface, evoking vivid memories of Canadian winters. The acoustics of this video's arena-like location carry the sounds of the lone skater upwards to mix with the site's ambient sounds that are recorded from eight

successively higher levels above the ice. As the video reaches its highest scenes on the eighth, thirteenth, and eighteenth floors, wind increasingly dominates the soundtrack, accentuating the isolation of the ice skater below. Taken together, the fifty-five audio/video vantage points of the "48 Abell

Street Ice Rink” evoke the collective eyes and ears of hundreds of occupants whose balconies overlook the site like private box seats above this development zone. These residents, who have already witnessed the demolition of the 48 Abell building, are intimately aware of daily progress of the

Epic building in its place. Asked to allow filming for the video from their balconies, they are participating in the creation of a historic document capturing the site in its transitional state between the recent past and future. In keeping with the video's documentary quality, the raw footage is recorded

using only available natural light.

Logistically, shooting must take place on a clear or overcast day with excellent atmospheric visibility.

As the 10-minute video needs to appear to progress in real-time once edited, its multiple clips must be shot within a continuous period of several hours,

eliminating obvious changes in lighting conditions. Excellent atmospheric visibility is required to capture the ice skater and site from as high up as eighteen storeys.

Given that the 48 Abell construction site is oriented along an east-west axis and is surrounded by condominium buildings on all but its eastern

end, recording is best to begin first thing in the morning when uninterrupted daylight first floods the site from the east. Ice and weather conditions permitting, the video is best shot on a Sunday. Construction work is not underway, leaving the site free of disruptive human presence, both within the chain-link fenced

construction site and
in the forecourts of
the surrounding condo
buildings. As
Torontonians know,
those who venture out
on a Sunday at
daybreak are blessed
to have the city to
themselves at its most
peaceful. It is during
these magic hours that
the raw footage of
"48 Abell Street Ice
Rink" is shot, setting

an idyllic tone for its first scenes. The opening shot of the video captures the ice skater from mid-calf down, focusing only on her skates, the quality of the ice, and the dynamic action that propels her forward. Composed of twelve clips, each about 6 seconds, this 75-second long scene captures the solitary

ice skater from twelve different locations spaced equidistantly apart along the edge of the ice. Given that the rink and camera are located at least six feet below ground level near the bottom of an earthen pit, dirt and rubble fill the background behind the skater. Throughout the first scene of the video, nothing of the

rink's urban context is revealed, leading viewers to believe it is part of a tranquil rural setting. This establishing scene grants viewers a sense of the scale and shape of the rink, the materiality of ice, and the weather conditions that have occasioned it. In the second scene of the video, ten clips frame the skater's

whole body from about 10 feet above the ice. A greater portion of her earthen surroundings and random debris in the background can be seen. The ruggedness of these embankments, marked as they are by the heavy equipment that has dug this void, contrasts with the pristine surface of the

ice. In the third scene of "48 Abell Street Ice Rink," the camera's vantage point begins to climb the buildings that border the construction site.

Comprised of eight clips, each about 9 seconds, this scene of the skater is shot from the roof of the two-storey Woolfitt's building and the second-floor balconies

of surrounding
condominiums that
offer unimpeded
panning shots.

Encircling the site in a
clockwise direction,
two shots from
opposite ends of the
Woolfitt's roof at
1153 Queen Street
West and from
balconies in the
Artscape Triangle
Lofts at 38 Abell
Street are followed by

single clips from The Curve at 170 Sudbury Street, the 180 Sudbury Street affordable housing building, the Bohemian Embassy at 1171 Queen Street West, and 1155 Queen Street West. Showing the chain-link fence that surrounds the 48 Abell ice rink, this scene may lead viewers to suspect the

site is industrial land undergoing soil remediation. The fourth scene continues to exclude clues to the rink's prime urban location, portraying the pristine ice as an oasis set within a desolate landscape. Composed of seven clips, each about 10 seconds, this 75-second long scene offers views from the

third floor balconies of the five residential buildings closely bordering the rink on three sides. With the permission of willing residents, footage of the ice skater is shot from third floor units at 38 Abell Street, 170 Sudbury Street, 180 Sudbury Street, 1171 Queen Street West, and 1155 Queen Street West. From this

height, several large garbage dumpsters and scrap construction materials on the rink's periphery continue to puzzle viewers trying to reconcile how an ice rink could exist within such a post-industrial landscape. In the video's fifth scene, glimpses of the lower floors of the surrounding buildings first emerge, shifting

viewers' sense of the site away from strictly rural locales towards an uneasy combination of recent North American architecture and barren land, possibly in the suburbs. This 75-second long scene is edited from six clips, each about 12 seconds long. The combination of glass, brick veneering, and pre-

cast trim dominating the lower four floors of these buildings could denote suburban retail construction, and viewers may well conclude that the location is part of a large brownfield site in the midst of revitalization to accommodate the expanding suburbs. The sixth scene of the video offers more

inclusive views of the surrounding buildings that might indicate a large institutional setting. Composed of five clips, each about 14 seconds, this scene is shot from the eighth floor balconies of the Westside Gallery Lofts, The Curve building, 180 Sudbury Street, the Bohemian Embassy, and 1155 Queen Street West.

Shooting from this vantage point reveals the buildings opposite to be taller than typical one to two storey suburban retail outlets. Such a cluster of evidently new buildings in an enclosed site of this scale could well suggest a growing university campus. In the seventh scene, shot from the

thirteenth floor, the site is revealed as unmistakably urban and residential. The 75-second long scene is comprised of four clips, each 18 seconds, shot from the thirteenth floor balconies of the three 18-storey high-rises that ascend above the "48 Abell Street Ice Rink" on two sides. From this height,

glimpses are offered of the unembellished glass curtain wall construction reserved for floors five and up of these buildings. Far below, the lone ice skater appears as a miniature figure providing scale reference as if part of an architectural model of the Queen West Triangle development zone. The eighth and

closing scene of the
"48 Abell Street Ice
Rink" video, shot from
the eighteenth floor
balconies of the three
towers that enclose
the site, offers the
video's highest and
widest vantage point.
While the three shots,
25 seconds each, still
remain centered on the
lone ice skater below,
she is barely
recognizable as a

moving point on the
equally diminished ice
rink. Now filling most
of the picture plane,
the surrounding
buildings become
recognizable Toronto
landmarks allowing
many viewers to place
the scene within the
city's urban grid. From
this height, the
surrounding condo
towers define a
massive void at their

center, where once the 48 Abell factory building stood. Within this bigger picture, the rink's existence feels inexplicable, prompting viewers to contemplate whether it is a mirage. The idyllic portrayal of the ice skater gliding in a seemingly rural setting in the first scenes of "48 Abell Street Ice Rink" is highly

reminiscent of
Canadian painter
William Kurelek's
(1927-1977) works
that illustrated his
childhood memories of
winter ice skating on
naturally formed
expanses of frozen
water. In his 1973
book, "A Prairie Boy's
Winter," Kurelek's
illustration
accompanying a short
text titled "Skating on

the Bog Ditch" shows four boys racing into the distance along what he describes as a frozen drainage main that extended for miles. In the illustration, this linear ditch cuts right down the center of the picture plane, extending in one-point perspective towards the flat prairie horizon 1/6th from the top of

the image. Three boys are captured in full-stride on the ice, while a fourth has tumbled having gotten his skates caught in a snowdrift. Another Kurelek painting from 1974, titled "Skating on Spring Run-Off," depicts four youths skating on a vast patch of frozen water pooled in a low spot in the otherwise flat

prairie. The four skaters are placed at cardinal points opposite each other on the ice, emphasizing its vastness. A boy half the height of the painting enters the scene at the bottom of the frame while another appears as a dot upon the horizon line, a third from the top of the picture. This painting was

reproduced in the
1975 book "Kurelek's
Canada" alongside a
brief text in which he
concisely articulates
the sense of freedom
that unbridled
movement across
these vast natural
rinks imparted to him.
This is the same sense
of rapturous freedom I
expect the lone skater
in the "48 Abell Street
Ice Rink" video to

convey to viewers,
even as the rink is
revealed to sit within a
construction site
bound on all sides by
tall buildings. That
said, when the ice rink
that first appears as
an unplanned leisure
space turns out to be
locked within a highly
regulated site of
capital wherein the
skater's perceived
solitude and freedom

are ceded to urban density and containment, a change in tone from idyllic to melancholic occurs. As my proposed video transitions into the second half of its ten-minute running time, and the skater's apparently bucolic location is upended, viewers may be reminded of artist Mark Lewis's 2009

film "Nathan Phillips Square, A Winter's Night, Skating." In Lewis's 4-minute long film, a young couple in the foreground cavorts on the ice rink in front of Toronto City Hall, against the backdrop of its matching towers. This work is as much a slice of pictorial Canadiana as are the paintings of William Kurelek, and

Lewis, like Kurelek, ascribes his interest in his subject to childhood memories. For Lewis, ice skating in front of Toronto City Hall in the 1960s invoked resounding optimism for Toronto's future, as embodied in the outstanding modernity of the building and its public plaza. Designed by Finnish architect Viljo

Revell, the complex opened in 1965, signaling a new architectural beginning for Toronto. While my proposed "48 Abell Street Ice Rink" video starts out with a similarly romantic vision of ice skating within the city, its conclusion is more ambivalent than Lewis's utopian portrait of then-new

Toronto architecture. In the last scenes of my video the tone shifts as it transitions from a serene portrait of the ice rink to a document of its desolate location shortly after demolition of the 48 Abell Street factory building. These scenes, offer the highest, widest, and most inclusive views of the

“48 Abell Street Ice Rink” location, laying bare the development site’s transitional state. My proposed video could be seen as a restaging of Mark Lewis’s “Nathan Phillips Square, A Winter’s Night, Skating.” In my work, the condo towers surrounding the 48 Abell construction site stand in for Toronto’s

City Hall towers, and a frozen pond in an earthen pit replaces the immaculate Nathan Phillips Square ice rink. The once-contested 48 Abell Street development site expresses not the simple optimism of 1960s Modernism but the unrelenting condo boom that is currently reshaping Toronto's cityscape. The "48

Abell Street Ice Rink”
video was conceived
as a poetic memorial
to this building’s past
as embodied in the
elemental, accidental,
and fleeting sheet of
ice that froze over its
open grave on January
15, 2012 – a literal
and figurative
threshold between the
past and future of the
site. Over the last ten
years I have developed

an artistic practice
working primarily in
sculptural installation,
while occasionally
using film and video as
a tool for
documentation, a
source of inspiration,
and medium in its own
right. Emblematic of
my overall practice,
the formative
installations
"Swingsite" (2003)
and "Parlour of

Twilight" (2006), as well as my proposed "48 Abell Street Ice Rink" video are all site-specific responses to Toronto's urban fabric and architectural history. Dotted along Queen Street West between Spadina and Dufferin, all three projects are located in the alleyways just behind this main cultural and consumer-

driven corridor.
Significantly, the
chosen sites are
situated on the
immediate periphery,
each quietly
commemorating a
history of prior use. By
temporarily ascribing a
new function to these
spaces, these
artworks allow
participants and
viewers to occupy and
thus grasp the void

left behind after the processes of urban change. In 2003 I made "Swingsite," an unauthorized installation of a playground swing in a very narrow triangular space wedged between 505 and 507 Queen Street West. Undetectable within the seamless facade of the buildings lining Queen Street, the

installation was accessible only through the alley behind. The piece transformed this space – a former lightwell whose previous function was nullified when windows facing onto it were filled with brick – into an experiential work of art. Use of the swing granted the lone participant an

incredible sense of freedom, in marked contrast to the space's confinement and the raw physicality of the brick walls that rushed past swinging participants, only a foot away on either side of them. Making use of peripheral spaces deemed worthless by others has been a constant personal and artistic

strategy for establishing my place within the restrictive economic reality of downtown Toronto. In tandem with the installation, I produced a 1-minute long video documenting this off-site installation for viewing in the gallery exhibition it was part of. From 2005 to 2006, I collaborated with artist Simone

Moir on "Parlour of Twilight," a permanent installation commissioned by the Gladstone Hotel at 1214 Queen Street West. A permanent, fully functional hotel room, it took inspiration from the recurring film noir motif of the lone individual in a hotel room in the city at night, in order to

commemorate the Gladstone's seedier history as a rooming house before its transformation into artist-run hotel. The central feature of "Parlour of Twilight" is a set of security bars fabricated in electric pink neon tubing that are installed over Room 405's window on the back of the hotel, facing north into

the alley behind. This neon sculpture is a seductive interpretation of the vernacular wrought iron work common to the homes directly north of the hotel, which serves as both ornament and armament. "Parlour of Twilight's" neon bars turn on at twilight, becoming a beacon visible from Dundas

Street at night, before turning off again during the day to resume the conventional appearance of white-painted wrought iron. Over this fourth floor hotel room's window, the bars' security function is rendered mute. Instead the neon sculpture serves to reiterate the division between interior and

exterior, private and public, hotel guest and those displaced in the redevelopment of this historic hotel. My 2008 video, "PK20," is the closest formal precedent for my proposed "48 Abell Street Ice Rink" video. About 1.5 minutes long, "PK20" is a tongue-in-cheek portrait of an iconic Modernist chair

flawlessly used as a sled pulling the video's protagonist behind a team of eight sled dogs across a frozen northern lake. The video was conceived by assigning the PK20 chair (ca. 1967) a new function, one suggested by its dynamic sculptural form, and a new context, suggested by the blank white spaces

of its 1960s Modernist promotional photos – both substitutions speaking to the chair’s Scandinavian design origins. While “PK20” shares the winter setting of my proposed new video project, its importance as a precedent lies in the exploration of the relationship between the lone protagonist and an environment

that is indeterminate,
being both fabricated
and natural, urban and
rural. "Swingsite,"
"Parlour of Twilight,"
and "PK20," all relate
to my proposed "48
Abell Street Ice Rink"
video as reflections on
the struggle to find
one's place within
one's environment,
echoing my own
struggle as an artist
perennially seeking

suitable housing in downtown Toronto, which intersects with the recent history of the 48 Abell factory building. Having served as artist live/work space for over thirty years, the now demolished building is often credited as the origin point and anchor of the surrounding neighborhood's artistic identity. Though

ultimately I was never to live in the building, in February 2010 I applied for a live/work studio there, thinking that a converted industrial space would suit the needs of my artistic practice. Many friends had lived in the building over the years, and I knew that it was very well organized and maintained. My

application to live there was turned down and I moved instead into a poorly maintained heritage building at Niagara and Tecumseth Street where artists have also resided for decades. In my studio, the roof leaked after every rain, the smell of mold lingered, and the service elevator had been broken for a

decade, necessitating
the difficult
transportation of
furniture and sculpture
materials through a
maze of narrow
interlocking hallways
to the third floor
where I lived. Within
six months I moved
out, and Toronto's
historic artist live/
work spaces no longer
held any charm for me.
In September 2011 I

moved into 180
Sudbury Street, which
borders 48 Abell
Street to the south,
following an
application process
and yearlong wait for
the completion of
construction. When
demolition of the 48
Abell Street factory
building began in
November 2011, I was
able to watch from the
balcony of my new

third floor live/work apartment. I felt as if I was witnessing the closing of a chapter in Toronto artist housing and the beginning of a new one. That I now live in the most secure, stable, suitable, well maintained, and reasonably priced space I have had in my thirteen years as an artist in Toronto can be attributed to the

efforts of community
activists and
developers who
reached a Section 37
agreement with the
City of Toronto to
build new space for
artists and arts
organizations in the
Queen West Triangle.
Artist live/work units
fill the second, third,
and fourth floors of
the Artscape Triangle
Lofts at 38 Abell

Street and the
affordable-housing
building at 180
Sudbury Street. Seven
non-profit media arts
organizations will be
taking up permanent
location within an
adjacent condo
development at 6
Lisgar Street, across
the street from where
Mercer Union, a
Centre for
Contemporary Art,

resided until it had to move from its rental space at 37A Lisgar Street in 2008. The building was demolished soon after to make way for another of the twenty Queen West Triangle building projects proposed and/or completed in the last six years. Art Metropole will take up purchased space in the

Epic building at 48
Abell Street when it is
finished. Like several
of these organizations,
they will be leaving
behind the precarity of
escalating rent and the
erosion of affordable
production and
presentation spaces
for art in downtown
Toronto. Both
intrigued by and
subject to the
processes of Toronto's

development, my artistic practice has been shaped by it. Many of my ideas have been born from a process of neighborhood discovery following my own eviction and relocation. For example, "Swingsite" was an idea generated as a site-specific response to the architecture of my

own home. This public art intervention was originally conceived for personal use, in a domestically scaled lightwell between my home at 26½ Glasgow Street and the adjoining neighbor's house at 26 Glasgow Street. It was not until I was evicted from this home and moved to 543 Queen Street West that the project

moved forward, upon discovery of a perfect site between 505 and 507 Queen Street West. After completing "Swingsite," and still living on Queen Street, I became fascinated by the annual flooding and freezing of water on a neighboring building's flat rooftop. It was then that the idea first came to me of making a video

about an unconventional urban ice skating rink. Like "Swingsite," the idea was not realized in the location that sparked it but was to travel with me for many years. When I settled at 180 Sudbury Street in 2011, the seedling of my 2004 idea blossomed upon discovery of the ice rink forming in the 48

Abell Street

**construction pit within
view of my balcony.**

**But my interest in this
subject matter actually
dated back to the
winter of 1991 and
my trip to New York
City. Before I arrived,
an unusual amount of
snow had fallen and
during most of my
time there it was
extremely cold.**

However, towards the

end of my trip the air warmed up significantly and it rained for a couple of days before temperatures returned to well below freezing. On my last afternoon in Manhattan, I made a trip to Battery Park, and found it entirely covered in several inches of ice. To walk through the park was treacherous, but all I

could think of was how incredible it would be to skate across its boundless expanse! If only I could find ice skates to rent, on short notice, at night in New York City. I recalled the Rockefeller Center's ice rink, made famous in many Hollywood movie scenes shot there at night, and I briefly

considered the possibility of stealing away with a pair of their rental skates, jumping onto a subway bound for Battery Park, and experiencing my solitary night skate. That night in 1991 set in motion my long-term, as yet unconsummated, relationship with unconventional urban ice rinks. My next

encounter with such a phenomenon came more than nine years later. In the summer of 2000, my friend Paul, who had just moved out a loft space in the 48 Abell building, showed me a series of photos he had taken of the adjacent Woolfitt's building roof covered in a sheet of ice in the winter of 1995. I was captivated. In 2003,

as if willed into being,
my own 'backyard'
urban roof rink
appeared when I
moved to 534 Queen
Street West. Directly
across the alleyway
behind my apartment,
stood a large single
storey warehouse with
a flat roof. Each
winter between 2003
and 2006 I observed
from my third floor
window as rainwater

partially flooded this roof then froze into large patches of ice. All I could think was how incredible it would be to skate on this surface, elevated above the city. On a very cold winter night in 2004 I returned home from work to find what looked to be, at least from my kitchen window, the best ice skate-able

conditions I had ever
seen atop 520
Richmond Street West.
Needing to take a
closer look, I climbed a
tree next to the
building and gained
access to the roof.
Unfortunately, the
roof's protective
gravel was still poking
through the surface of
the ice, and my dream
skate session would
have to wait, unless I

intervened in the natural rink-making process by flooding it with additional water. I thought about running a hose from my kitchen to the 520 Richmond Street West roof, which stood no more than 50 feet away from my window. Then I began to consider turning this into a community effort by recruiting the

help of the numerous residents who lived in buildings overlooking 520 Richmond's roof. I imagined that if we all ran hoses out of our apartments to the roof, we would have a truly amazing rink in no time. By sheer coincidence CBC was running a "Hockey Night in Canada Backyard Rink Contest" and I

considered how entry into the competition might help us gain permission from the building owners for this project, as well as rally the community into action for what surely stood to be a winning entry. Alas, my plans remained a fantasy that winter and the next. In March 2006, forced once more to move, I

packed up my urban ice rink video idea, and took it with me to my new home at 117 Sheridan Avenue where it remained in storage, awaiting the next occurrence of the natural urban ice rink phenomenon. Several winters passed, bringing no ice suitable for skating but another eviction. The 2010 sale of 117 Sheridan

Avenue prompted my move in September 2011 to 180 Sudbury Street, my present quarters. From my east-facing balcony in this brand new artist live/work unit I kept tabs on the demolition and excavation of the last remaining sections of the 48 Abell Street factory building from November through December 2011. All

that was left behind was an empty void in the earth. When it began filling with rain and groundwater I started to monitor the site daily, knowing from experience that an ice rink could potentially form. On the night of January 14, 2012, all factors aligned, turning this shallow pond into the latest in a series of

natural urban rinks
that I'd encountered
over the last twenty
years. But again, the
elusive urban rink
escaped my artistic
grasp. Within 24 hours
of coming into being,
the ice was already
melting. My unfulfilled
encounters with urban
ice rinks, including the
unrealized and
unrealizable "48 Abell
Street Ice Rink" video

dot my past like my own personal “Elfstedentocht,” the intended-to-be annual Dutch outdoor ice skating race that has only happened 15 times in its 104 year history, due to unfavorable ice conditions.

“Elfstedentocht,” which translates into English as “eleven cities tour,” is a

200-kilometer long
speed skating
competition held
outdoors on the frozen
canals connecting the
eleven historic cities of
the northern Dutch
province of Friesland.
The event was
inaugurated in 1909
with the intention of
being held each year
when the ice across
the entire course
measures a safe 6-inch

thickness. Given the unpredictability of the weather, the event has massive gaps in its history, such as the twenty-two year wait between 1963 and 1985, or the event's ongoing postponement since last happening in 1997. Given that the announcement that the tour will proceed comes only 48 hours beforehand,

anticipation reaches a fever pitch across the Netherlands whenever there are several consecutive days of freezing temperatures in January and February. Lacking any notice and having only a 24-hour window of opportunity, I would never have been able to shoot the raw footage for the "48 Abell Street Ice Rink"

video as I've described it in all its cinematic ambition. Months of preparation would have been required. Merely to secure permission from tenants and landlords to shoot from the roofs and balconies facing the site would have taken weeks. To accomplish the video's fifty-five location shoot within a

continuous period of several hours would have required four to six fully equipped camera crews to expedite the work. The organization and briefing of multiple crews of production assistants, videographers, and location sound experts, would also have taken weeks. If and when suitable ice, weather

and site conditions aligned, video production crews would have needed to be available within six hours notice.

Miraculously, the single day when the 48 Abell Street construction site ice rink was frozen solid and clear of snow – Sunday January 15, 2012 – was also a perfect day for

shooting my proposed video, given the stable weather, lighting conditions, and the quietness of that day of the week. The sun rose at 7:48 AM, illuminating the site with daylight from the only side not obstructed by another condo building.

Tempered by overcast skies that prevailed until around 1:00 PM,

this direct light was even and free from strong shadows, and would have provided relatively constant lighting conditions throughout the morning. Excellent visibility that day provided the clear views needed to capture the ice skater from as high up as eighteen storeys. As it was a Sunday

morning, construction crews and passers-by were nowhere to be seen, making it the ideal day of the week for uninterrupted video production on the site at its most peaceful. I was unprepared for this ideal but far too brief opportunity. As a result, my idea for the "48 Abell Street Ice Rink" video will forever remain an

unrealized and
unrealizable
proposal. If a
picture is worth a
thousand words,
is a video worth
5778 words?

Corwyn Lund
April 2013