

Best,

A large, bold, black handwritten signature that reads "M." with a period at the end. The letters are thick and expressive, characteristic of a calligraphic style.

Micah Lexier

National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives

15 September – 31 December 2004

The work of Micah Lexier [12] is autobiographical, although not in a personal or anecdotal sense. Instead, the artist explores our innate desire to measure our perception of self against that of others by delineating various points of view, and by either highlighting or obscuring relationships to people, objects, and conventional practices that we all share. Signatures, for example, are highly individualistic. Rather than signing his own name, Lexier has used “convincing signatures” [15, 17–19] of his name written by others. In doing so, he transforms his personal identity into a universal one. In another early example, *Two Together* [5], the artist has used three potent symbols: a pink triangle overlapped by a yellow one, to form a Star of David, the vellum mailer proclaiming his affiliation with the Jewish and gay communities. The merged triangles have a dual significance – they point to the experience of being identified, marked, and consequently marginalized for membership of a particular group, and they also proclaim pride in acknowledging such membership.

Lexier emphasizes the fact that human beings look to those close to them for identification and reinforcement of self-image. Children measure themselves against older mentors and authority figures, adults compare themselves to their siblings and to their own children, and lovers see themselves in light of each other. Lexier produced “Mr. Caldwell,” a group of works [6–11] that addresses generational relationships, when he reached the age Mr. Caldwell had been when he was his Grade 6 teacher. To deflect from the literal and personal story, the images were taken from standard school dictionaries of the 1960s. They were chosen to define and illustrate the relationship between a boy and a man, as well as to reflect the man within the boy.

Lexier later used “book sculptures” to pursue the concept of relationships. The sculptures, which comprised paired portraits in the form of columns of stacked books [20, 21], are defined by their relationship to each other (parents and children, siblings, lovers) rather than identified by name. The artist selected a detail of one of the sculptures for the cover of the exhibition catalogue, repeating the imagery of man/boy and father/son [22]. The dimensions of the catalogue also relate proportionately to the book sculptures themselves.

Another exhibition catalogue, *A Portrait of David* [23], is a trajectory of portraits that enumerate collective identities and attributes, in this case a group of seventy-five males who share the name of David and who live in Winnipeg. Lexier's choice of the number of individuals in the group ties in with the life expectancy of a Canadian male, and the book has seventy-five pages, each David occupying one page that records a particular year in that David's life. Although biographical details (other than the accounted age) are not provided on the page, the collective venture underlines Lexier's message of human interrelatedness.

Other works measuring a life in time and space are examined in the series *A Minute of My Time* [26–36] and in Lexier's self-portraits [37–40]. In the former, for example, Lexier “tests” actuarial evidence for “proof” of life expectancy, although we know that it is impossible for one person to experience a given moment as another experiences it, or for us to have any assurance of how long any one of us will live. In other works [24–25], he uses coins and a ruler as means of measuring or weighing particular moments in a life. Lexier also questions the value and meaning of numbers. A sculpture in the Gallery's permanent collection, *All Numbers Are Equal (Perpetua)*, which is reproduced on a mailer [43], makes the numerals one to nine equal in surface area. The artist's numbered invitation cards [44–46], distributed randomly, as well as his numbered stationery [48, 50], use numbers in a manner both contrived yet convincing. In this instance, although the stationery itself may not be unique, the number on the upper right-hand corner highlights the uniqueness of a particular correspondence between two people.

The artist considers his printed work an integral part of his artistic practice. Unlike the first generation of conceptualists, whose art consists of documentary material rather than art objects as the principle form and content of a work, Lexier's printed work complements his sculptures and installations. The works do, however, share the conceptualist's use of printed matter to expand the experience of a work or to offer an alternative exhibition format, thereby reaching a wider audience beyond the confines of a gallery. The meticulous and spare design of these works also recalls the minimalist aesthetic. Upon reflection and contemplation, many of these items have since come to have a life of their own. And, as an archival collection, they provide deeper insight into how the artist envisions and experiences his life.

Peter Trepanier

Head, Reader Services

With special thanks to Frances Smith.

Checklist

The materials in this exhibition are drawn from the Library and from the Art Metropole Collection, gift of Jay Smith, Toronto, 1999.

1. *All Across Canada / À travers le Canada*. Winnipeg, 1982 [poster].
2. *I'm on Your Side / A Responsibility*. Winnipeg, 1981 [poster].
3. Michael Klein and Micah Lexier. "Dual Bi-Cycle Duel," *Midcontinental* 1:2 (1982): 25–30 [journal].
4. *Micah Lexier / Installation / Anna Leonowens / Gallery / April 10–14, 1984 / Board Room / Presentation / Thursday / April 12, 3 p.m. / N.S.C.A.D. / Halifax / Nova Scotia* [announcement (ribbon)].
5. "Two Together" / *Micah Lexier / December 3 to 21, 1985 / Eye Level Gallery / Halifax, Nova Scotia* [announcement].
6. *Reference*. Toronto, 1987 [t-shirt].
7. *Mr. Caldwell / Micah Lexier / YYZ / June 6 to July 4, 1987 / Toronto* [announcement (balloon)].
8. *Micah Lexier at Mercer Union / November 16 to December 16, 1989 / Toronto* [announcement].
9. *Mr. Caldwell / Micah Lexier / Forest City Gallery / November 27 to December 19, 1987 / London, Ontario* [announcement].
10. *Micah Lexier / "Mr. Caldwell" / November 30 to December 17, 1988 / Eye Level Gallery / Halifax, N.S.* [announcement].
11. *Mr. Caldwell / Micah Lexier / May 11–29, 1988 / Plug-In Inc. / Winnipeg, Manitoba / Mr. Caldwell / Micah Lexier / June 8–25, 1988 / The New Gallery / Calgary, Alberta* [poster].
12. *Micah Lexier (Mike-ah Lex-ear) (416) 534–1099* [business card].
13. *Micah Lexier at NAC / June 8 to 30, 1990 / Niagara Artists' Centre / St. Catharines, Ontario* [announcement].
14. *Micah Lexier at A.K.A. / March 10 to 31, 1990 / Saskatoon, Saskatchewan* [announcement].
15. *Micah from Baba Sarah*. 1989 [pamphlet].
16. *Micah Lexier: Multiples / May 1 to May 26, 1990 / Open Studio Gallery / Toronto* [announcement].
17. *Name and Family Name: An Exhibition by Micah Lexier at the Stride Gallery / September 9 to October 3, 1992 / Calgary, Alberta* [announcement (envelope)].
18. *Wallpaper*, 1992.
19. *Micah Lexier / Ten Relationships*, 1991 [announcement (envelope)].
20. *Micah Lexier / Book Sculptures*, 1993 [bookmark illustrating *Father and Son*.]
21. *Micah Lexier / 'Book Sculptures: Taller Child / (Adolescent Male)' 1993* [image printed on paper bag for the Brunswick Street Bookstore and the Centre for Contemporary Photography, 1998.].
22. *Micah Lexier: Book Sculptures*. Oakville, Ontario: Oakville Galleries, 1993 [exhibition catalogue (cover)].
23. *A Portrait of David*. Winnipeg: The Art Gallery, 1994 [exhibition catalogue].
24. *Older Brother/Younger Sister*. Toronto: Art Metropole, 1995 [steel ruler].
25. *A Work of Art in the Form of a Quantity of Coins Equal to the Number of Months of the Statistical Life Expectancy of a Child Born January 6, 1995 / One and the Same / Invitation to an Exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York / Coin Piece (36/75, 39/75) / A Minute of My Time (July 20, 1997 23:53–23:54) / Gallery Hours* [custom-minted coin pieces, 1995–1997].
26. "A Minute of My Time." *Galerie Largeness World of Art*. Toronto, 1996 [journal].
27. *Micah Lexier / Large Steel Works / May 27, 1999 / Illustrated: A Minute of My Time (December 7, 1998, 22:34–22:35) / Trépanier Baer Gallery / Calgary, Alberta* [announcement].
28. *Micah Lexier / A Minute of My Time / August 26, 1996 20:14–20:15 / Made for YYZ in an edition of 60 / of which this is number 46* [acid-etched stainless steel multiple].
29. *Micah Lexier / A Minute of My Time / Date June 9, 1997 / Time 14:32–14:33* [card].
30. *Micah Lexier: A Minute of My Time / February 28 to March 22, 1998 / Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina Public Library / Regina, SK* [announcement (four cards illustrating "A Minute of My Time," spraypainted on various surfaces throughout Toronto)].
31. *Micah Lexier / A Minute of My Time and Other Work / September 9 to October 10,*

- 1998 / Robert Birch Gallery / Toronto [announcement].
32. *A Minute of My Time / Micah Lexier / Explore the Passage of Time and / the Transient Nature of Existence / Opening Reception / Thursday, February 25, 1999 / 7:30 pm / at the Whyte Museum. Banff, Alberta* [announcement (four cards)].
33. *A Large Wall-Mounted A Minute of My Time Piece, / a Smaller Three-dimensional A Minute of My Time / Piece That Sits on the Floor, a Large Wall Text Piece, a Coin Piece and Maybe Something Else / Gitte Weise Gallery / 26 October–20 November 1999. Sydney, Australia* [announcement].
34. *Micah Lexier / January 9–February 6, 1999 / Jack Shainman Gallery / New York, NY* [announcement].
35. *In the Viewing Room / Micah Lexier / A Minute of My Time: New Steel Works / May 1, 1997 / Trépanier Baer Gallery / Calgary, Alberta* [announcement].
36. *Micah Lexier: A Minute of My Time (Prints) / Open Studio Gallery / September 8 to October 3, 1998 / Toronto* [announcement].
37. *(Life Lived) / (Life to Come) / Micah Lexier / Based on Statistical / Life Expectancy, 1995 / Made for Homogenius 4 / in an Edition of 50 / of Which This Is Number 41. Toronto, 1995* [perforated card stock].
38. *Autoportrait sous la forme d'une / invitation partagée proportionnelle- / ment entre le noir de ces caractères / qui représente la vie vécue et / l'espace blanc restant qui représente la vie à vivre, sur la base / des statistiques d'espérance de vie / Exposition Micah Lexier, 37 / Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal / 17 juin–20 septembre 1998* [announcement].
39. *Self-Portrait as an Invitation / Divided Proportionally Between / This Black Type Representing / Life Lived and the Remaining / White Space Representing Life / to Come, Based on Statistical / Life Expectancy / Micah Lexier, 37 Exhibition / Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal / 17 June–20 September 1998* [announcement].
40. *Micah Lexier: Self-Portrait as a Puzzle Divided Proportionally / Between the Three Pieces Representing Life Lived and the Remaining / Area Representing Life to Come, Based on Statistical Life Expectancy. Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph, Ontario, 1998* [announcement (puzzle)].
41. *Micah Lexier, 1 / Opening October 2002 / Gallery 111, University of Manitoba. Winnipeg* [announcement (folding card)].
42. *Micah Lexier / Work About Numbers and Other Things / Gitte Weise Gallery / 21 November–15 December 2001. Paddington, Australia* [announcement (folding card)].
43. *Micah Lexier: All Numbers Are Equal, 2000 / Each of the Numbers Has Been Sized So That the Area of Each Is Identical. Robert Birch Gallery, Toronto, 2000* [announcement (folding card)].
44. *Micah Lexier: Increment of One / Opening Friday, April 28 from 5 to 7 pm / Exhibition continues to May 27, 2000 / I Space Gallery / Chicago* [announcement (numbered sequentially in red ink)].
45. *Micah Lexier: Increment of One, 2 / Opening Saturday, September 16 from 9–11 pm / Performance Saturday, September 16 at 9:30 pm / Exhibition Continues through October 27, 2000 / Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center / Buffalo, NY* [announcement (numbered sequentially in silver ink)].
46. *Micah Lexier / All Numbers Are Equal / May 22–June 21, 2003 / Opening Reception / Thursday, May 22, 6–8 pm / Individually Numbered Exhibition Announcement, 2003 / Printed and Stamped Card, Edition of 5000, 4" x 6" / Jack Shainman Gallery / New York* [announcement (numbered sequentially in red ink)].
47. *Art Gallery of Ontario / Edward P. Taylor Research Library / Morey and Jennifer Chaplick / Library Fund for Contemporary Art* [bookplate].
48. Business card, numbered sequentially.
49. Change of address card.
50. Correspondence from the artist on letterhead, dated February 24, 2004, and envelope, numbered sequentially.

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