

Rona Ransch

## Biography

Originally from Germany, I am a doctoral student in the Interdisciplinary PhD program at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador with a focus on Humanities, Social Sciences and English since January 2018. My academic background is in Physics. I studied at the universities in Saarbrücken and Cologne and completed my Master's Degree with a thesis in high energy physics at the Saarland University in Saarbrücken in 1996. Since 1995, I have been a member of the *German Physical Society*. I have held positions as a scientific assistant at the Max Planck Institute for Colloid and Surface Research in Potsdam and at the University of Essen from 1997-1999. Subsequently, finally following an early vocation, I started a career as a visual artist. I was a guest student at the renowned Academy of Fine Art in Düsseldorf in 1999/2000 and completed a training in Multimedia Design at ca.medien.colleg in Essen in 2001.

I have been working as a freelance artist since 2000 and my works have been exhibited in solo and group shows internationally. For the realization of my research-based artistic projects I was awarded numerous grants and awards by international institutions. Not unlike in natural science, the revelation and visualization of genuinely invisible or unseen connections and phenomena is at the core of my artistic work. Using a wide range of media – from photography, video and animation over object art and installation to graphics and sound – my focus is on themes that defy an easy or ultimate description and understanding. The finished works leave space for associations and inspire an engagement by the viewer.

Newfoundland has been the place and subject of my work since 2007 when I first came to the island for an artist residency at the *Pouch Cove Foundation*. Residencies in Terra Nova National Park (2011) and on Fogo Island (2012 & 2015) followed. Other places in Canada I have been invited to work at include *Centre Est-Nord-Est* in Saint-Jean-Port-Joli (2008) and *Centre Daimon* in Gatineau (2010).

Since the start of my artistic career, I have been engaged in artists' associations and initiatives, notably as a member of *Berufsverband Bildender Künstler* and *Deutscher Künstlerbund*, as well as a member and board member of *Künstlerhaus Dortmund* and *Westdeutscher Künstlerbund*. In 2016, I was elected a delegate of *Internationale Gesellschaft der Bildenden Künste* (IGBK), Berlin, the German stakeholder for visual artists in Europe. I am committed to advancing the connections to artists' societies in North America and have become a member of the *Canadian Artists' Representation* (CARFAC) in 2017. Moreover, I have promoted other artists' work by curating thematic group shows and shared my expertise on artistic mobility and cross-cultural artistic practice at conferences and symposia across Europe.

In recent years, my growing interest in cultural and social themes made me wish to put the related humanistic and social scientific research on a solid academic foundation. This wish came within reach when I was accepted into the Interdisciplinary PhD program at Memorial University. Today, I consider my work not as research-based art but as inter- and multidisciplinary research in which my artistic sensitivity, together with the scientific structuredness, are key ingredients to develop my projects and visual art is one of the instruments (beside academic and creative writing) to convey my findings.

Newfoundland has become my partner's and my second home in 2016 when we purchased a small old home by the St. John's harbour that we are still busy refurbishing. Visit my photo blog for some impressions of making a new home across the Atlantic: [www.ransch.de/middle\\_battery.html](http://www.ransch.de/middle_battery.html)

## AMBIVALAND

### Sociocultural Ambivalence and the Aura of Newfoundland

Underlying my interdisciplinary doctoral studies at Memorial University is the observation that Newfoundland has a unique aura which cannot be explained by either historical, political, social, or environmental factors alone. The thesis is that, rather, it is the result of the universal, yet little reflected upon, phenomenon of ambivalence, i.e. the simultaneous relevance of two opposing values or concepts inherent to a single scenario.

Unlike ambiguity which stands for an uncertainty emerging from two opposite yet equally desirable or choosable options, ambivalence stands for the embracement of the opposition instead. Ambivalence differs from dichotomy and duality by not being exhausted by two mutually exclusive poles but being able to accommodate attributes that evade the opposition. This space between the poles, which enables the embracement of their opposition, allows ambivalence to defy its purely pejorative connotation by opening up the potential for creativity and productivity.

Ambivalence has occurred in Newfoundland in a number of sociocultural contexts since the settlement from Europe, sometimes impeding creativity and development and at others stimulating them: (1) the centrality and remoteness of the island in historical and early modern economic contexts; (2) the autonomy and dependence Newfoundlanders have long been exposed to within the merchant credit system; (3) the dignity (within the outports) and powerlessness (towards environment, economy and politics) that shaped their lives; (4) the role of white Newfoundlanders as colonizers and those colonized; (5) their imaginary indigeneity and the cherishing of a European heritage; (6) the tradition-eroding “modernization” after confederation and concurrent efforts to preserve those traditions; (7) nostalgia and experimentation in the “Newfoundland Renaissance;” and (8) Newfoundlanders' attachment to the land and their obsession with resource development.

The reverberations of these ambivalences, I argue, are palpable in Newfoundland today. By tracing and analyzing ambivalence in contemporary Newfoundland on collective, individual and institutional levels, novel trajectories of understanding the local society and culture will be developed. Furthermore, the concept of ambivalence will be established as an alternative research lens that allows for the identification of new types of connectedness and differentiation between places across cultural, political, and geographic spheres.

The academic findings will be augmented by photography, video and sound pieces of both documentary and artistic character. Ultimately, an illustrated publication will be connected to digital resources online. The idea is to interweave scholarly argumentation and outcome with multimedia artworks to stimulate the eye, the ear and the brain.