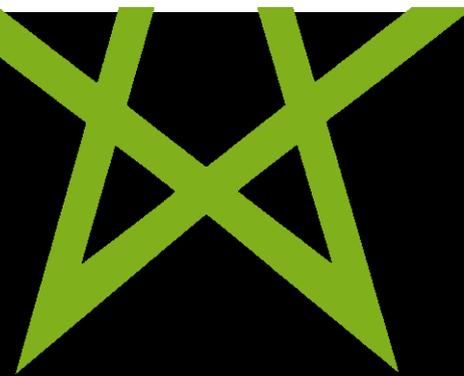


# FASTWÜRMS



*Interview conducted July, 2009*

**by Mark Laliberte**

Formed in 1979, FASTWÜRMS is an ongoing avatar-artist cultural project, the trademark and the joint authorship of Kim Kozzi and Dai Skuse.

These Toronto/Creemore-based multidisciplinary artists create art works that meld high and popular cultures, bent identity politics, social exchange and a no-budget cinematic sensibility.

FASTWÜRMS is a Witch identified art practice based firmly on punk and DIY outsider traditions. Employing a dark but often playful sense of humour, they freely mingle media, disciplines and art forms to question nature, the environment and issues of power.

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① Pusterniks (1985 – 2003), 2002 ▲



**In the spirit of setting a tone dedicated to sub-cultural enquiry — and because I read far too many music interviews as a zine-obsessed youth — I thought I would begin this conversation by asking you how the band chose its name, so to speak: why FASTWÜRMS, and what does it actually mean?**

The name FASTWÜRMS comes from a technique of Super 8 editing, a fast intercut 'punk' style of film assembly that Kim first created in 1979.

The *wurm technique* was built on fast 'physical' editing and a simple Super 8 conversion: *18 frames = 1 second = 3 inches*. The film was cut into lengths according to each shot sequence and pegged onto a clothesline. When all the hanging 'wurms' filled up 20 feet of clothesline, you started the rough edit by reading heads and tails and quickly moving each worm in and out, up and down the assembly line. Eventually the warehouse space, an illegal living space, would be filled with clotheslines at various heights strung with wurms at various stages of assembly.



Rejected and long trim wurms were initially dropped into cardboard boxes under each sequence line, and eventually all of the rejects for each film were dumped into a big industrial ‘wurm bin’.

When an assembly line was waiting for film processing or a re-shoot, a proper length of wurm would be dredged at random from the edit bin and slotted into sequence; of course, these holding pattern aleiatory wurms would often make it to the final cut and get tested during a public screening.

FASTWÜRMS Super 8 productions could take 5 days or up to 5 months depending on cash flow (self-funded using Spaghetti Factory waitress tips and Leisure World sales clerk salary) and how many intricate ‘on line’ projects were going at the same time. The Funnel\* open screening was the usual projection deadline. Several FASTWÜRMS films would often be entered at one time, some spliced fresh off the line just for the main event.

**I’m also curious about why you both changed your birth names within the context of the partnership and how you determined your new life names together?**

We did not change our birth names, but by using contractions and shorter family versions of our names we made a pragmatic simplification for our partnership: less syllables and letters makes for less keystrokes, etc.

David Skuse is my birth name, with Dai indicating a Welsh heritage — Dai is a standard diminutive in English for the Welsh Dafydd (pronounced *da-vidh*, the Welsh equivalent of David). The surname Skuse can refer to shade or shadow in old Celtic.

Kim is a standard English diminutive of Kimberley. Kozzi is a family nickname and simplification of the surname Kozolanka — a surname that comes from what is today Moldavia/Romania.

\* referring to the Toronto-based *Funnel Experimental Film Theatre*, 1977 – 1989

**You have a clear interest in language and its power to guide and evoke. Can you talk about your relationship to both poetry and sloganeering? Your writing seems to oscillate between these two differing modes.**

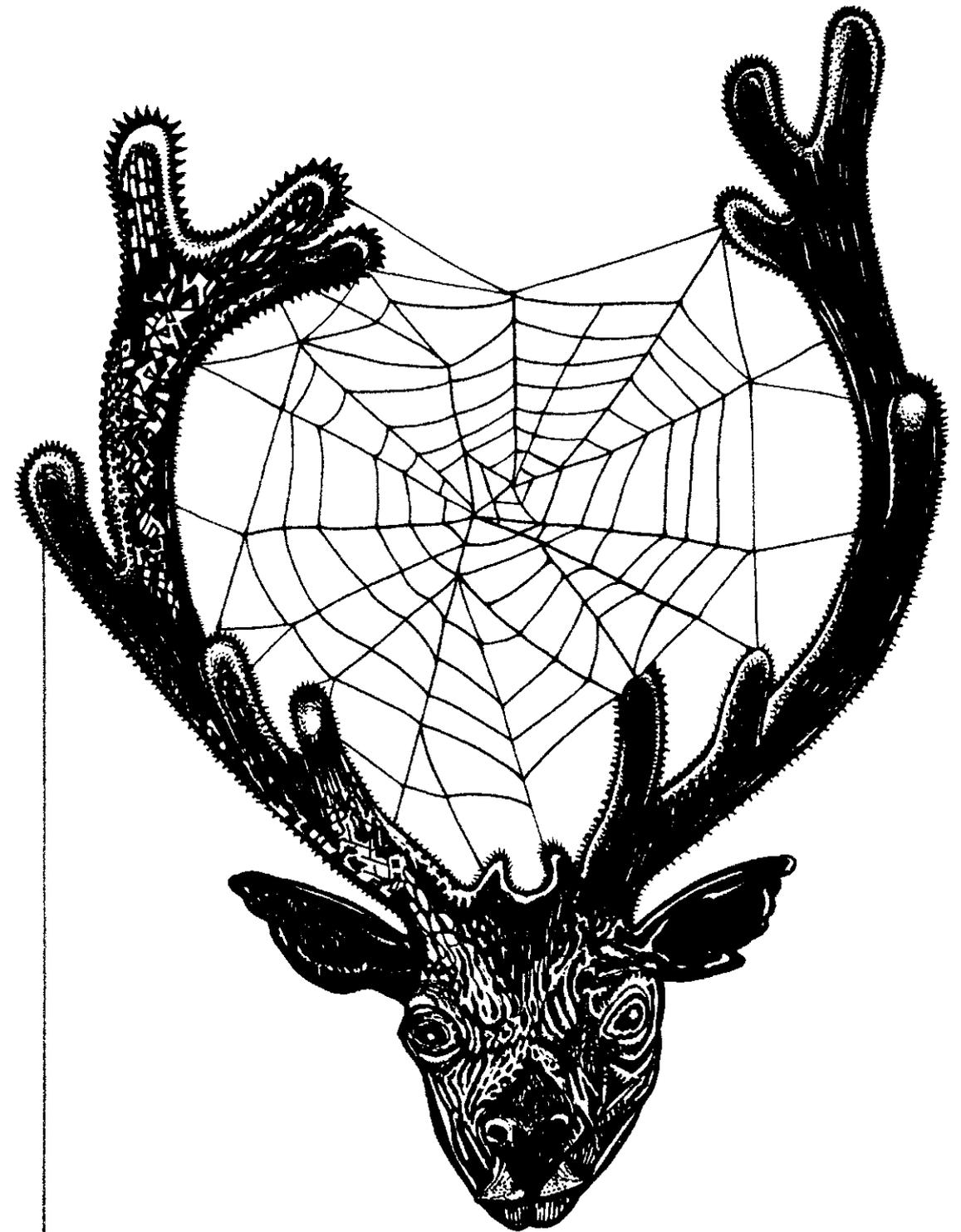
We both do a lot of reading for pleasure and research, and we share a love of literature, including poetry and advanced doggerel.

Sloganeering is a branch of doggerel that comes from the logic of late capitalism and the constant of marketing language, brand seduction, product pitch and consumer cant. We are both part of the first generation to grow up with television, so our attention deficit media minds are full of slogans for products that no longer exist, or never did.

On a recent cover of the *National Enquirer* (July 20, 2009 edition), they have a partial list of Michael Jackson’s medications that is a perfect example of both pharma brand market penetration and a tragic epic poem to a dead king: *Diprivan, Oxycontin, Demerol, Percocet, Ramelteon, Zaleplon, Eszopiclone, Zolpiderm, Palladone, Luvox, Dexedrine, Prozac, Aminorex, Desoxyn, Didrex, Celebrex*. Pharmaceutical celebrity poetry is one of the forms of modern doggerel that we study in detail because of its power to guide and evoke!

**“We venerate vernacular style” is not only a fascinating FASTWÜRMS sound-byte, it is a clever reference both to the Christian act of honouring saints and the Latin term *vernaculus* whose oldest meaning is “belonging to home-born slaves”. Can you unpack the slogan for us?**

We love the creative culture of our homeborn slaves (for those about to die, we salute you!) We are talking about rural craft culture and working class culture of all kinds. In other words, we learn a lot from untrained artists, folk artists and people that do it themselves. Diversity and self-sufficiency are beautiful things.



Poster image: Dark Pool/Dark Hart (Nuit Blanche @ Hart House, Toronto), 2006 ▶



① from left to right —  
 Kuven II, 1998; Sno-Man, 1994;  
 Sno-Man in-progress view, at  
 Center for the Fine Arts Miami;  
 DEMETER 13 installation detail:  
 Inflatable Pentagonam Snom'n,  
 Southern Exposure Gallery,  
 San Francisco, 1998 ▼

**What is the Witch Nation? How does the term serve your goals as creators?**

Witch Nation is a project we started at the invitation of curator Ryan Rice for his group exhibition *Anthem* (2007). We designed a flag for the exhibition and issued a directive from the Witch Nation, Ministry of Information:

*Witchcraft is an old resistance and liberation theology, an ancient cultural nation that shares with the modern*

*Hip-Hop nation a creative 'Can't Stop, Won't Stop' compulsion to exceed boundaries and limitations, to move beyond the narrow constraints of nation, race, etc., towards the diverse, plural, and hybrid, the commonwealth of a bountiful and beautiful, polymorphous and polycultural Avalon.*

*The Witch Nation anthem is a song about individual freedom and the price of universal liberty: "Do what you will, harm unto none".*

*In Witch culture personal freedom is a participation and positivity economy, enhance the liberty of 'others' and you prosper, constrain free will and you suffer.*

**When I think of your work and how you live, it seems like you are striving toward a kind of personal utopianism. Is that an overstatement?**

We are striving towards a utopia, but as our description of a Witch positivity economy suggests, our goal is not just a personal but a universal commonwealth.

Today, artists seem obsessed with gravitating towards large centres, stripping away their roots in the name of building up 'big pond credentials'. In antithesis, you live and work in a rural Ontario environment, and celebrate a nonurban trajectory and a working-class, craft aesthetic. Can you briefly discuss the peculiarities of rural art practice? Why does it seem so appropriate for you?

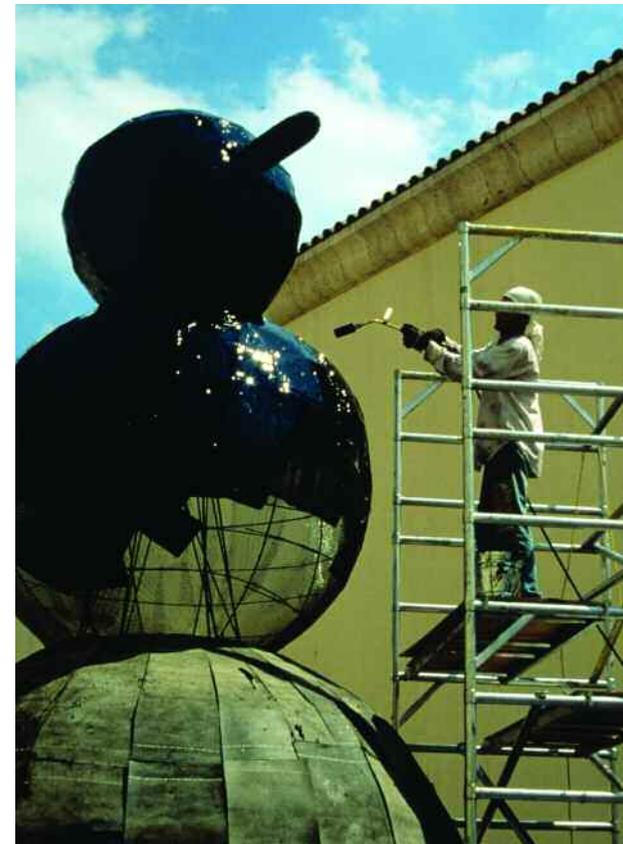
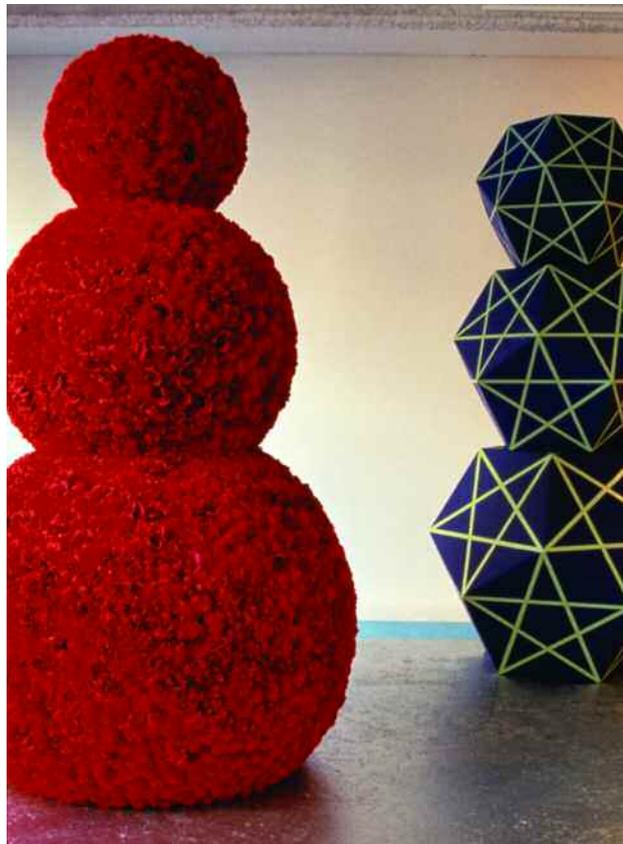
Diversity and self-sufficiency. Also, it keeps us close to trees and plants and animals. In Witch culture, the natural world is family and it is important for us to be close to our relatives and familiars.

We also think that visiting Berlin, Reykjavik, Tokyo, Paris, etc., is important because international contemporary art is also a kind of family, and it gives you insight into the limitations and potentials of your local culture.

You refer to "the mixing condition", a means of ordering a chaos of influences and interests within your various creative and personal systems. Is this a term of reference or a guiding principle?

A "mixing condition" is a term from plumbing that indicates a flaw in the proper organization of flow, with the result that in certain situations cold water comes out of the hot tap, or vice versa.

We use this term to indicate how in the natural and creative realm, mistakes, like mutations, can often lead to new creations and evolutionary advantages. Sexuality is a mixing condition. If you observe the natural world you can see a lot of examples of how chance or chaotic elements are integral to creative order and organizations.



**This idea of weaving webs is richly metaphoric: the web is a connective tissue system but it's also a trap, isn't it? How do you use the web as an icon or symbol within your practice?**

We encourage spiders — not just web spiders but jumping and hunting spiders — to live in and around our home because they prey on the insects that prey on us. As artists we admire spiders for the complex iconography of web structures and construction, the amazing chemical sophistication and strength of spinneret threads. The rich variety, patterns and colours of spider opisthosoma, like the orb weaver, are pure eye candy. The biology of spiders is much more interesting to us than the metaphors.

Our personal favourite book in the field of arachnology is *The Biology of Spiders* by Rainer F. Foelix (1979, Harvard University Press) — we highly recommend it.

**Witches and spider webs have long been associated in the pop consciousness. It seems to me, in fact, that the skin of real witchcraft sits quite comfortably on the surface of popular culture today — an unreal taxidermic construction made of pointed hats, flowing capes and corn-husk brooms. How have you capitalized on the stereotypes that film and popular holiday have introduced?**



Identity politics is a state of constant negotiation. In terms of popular representation, we have the distinct advantage of not being a visible minority, which is also a major disadvantage in the sense that accurately identifying Witches has often been a pathological obsession of authority structures in Western culture for many centuries, leading to mass murder and torture for thousands of citizens. It is shocking to see in recent years the reintroduction by Western authorities of torture and proxy torture to discover and uncover evil, and the extensive funding of research programs intended to reveal the essential characteristic of lies, to quantify and fix the marks of deceit!

The unreal construction of Witch stereotypes that you describe is a product of this historical obsession and tragedy, a fantastic projection that vacillates between humour and horror. We choose the humour because the tragedy is beyond representation, way too real and revealing.

**Let's now veer away from popular sentiment, and take a closer look at the state of otherness that permeates your collective project and simultaneously the fringe communities you identify with. The webs that bind magic and queerness together are strong, and can be traced through many minor histories of past generations the world over. What is it that so appropriately binds contemporary occult, queer and punk sub-cultures together?**

The book of the old testament, *Leviticus*, that sanctions murdering all homosexuals also gives clear directions for killing all Witches. What binds us to queer and many other sub-cultures is a shared history of unjustified persecution and oppression. Aside from this obvious affinity for justice, we also support diversity as the cornucopia of creative evolution.

**Search engines provide doorways to possible worlds, in theory making the smallest of creative movements less difficult to access.**

**Singer Antony Hegerty (of *Antony and the Johnsons*) has often commented on the change that the Internet has had on the very idea of sub-culture, and, in his tone, one can sense he laments the change: "With the Internet, the playing field's been leveled. There's equal access to Beyoncé and Rozz Williams." Does access, however, equal interest? Does the average person notice all these small doors?**

We have been noticing lately a spate of similar lamentations about the loss of sub-culture authenticity — and the loss of the quest for that authenticity — as somehow a downside of the Internet. We miss steam trains and spinning wheels, but nowadays if we miss them too much, we can always download plans from the Internet and build our own.

"Poverty is the worst form of violence." (apologies to Gandhi). We are of the opinion that poverty of information and access to information is also a terrible thing. We will trade our nostalgia for butter churns for more bandwidth and data speed.

**In his *Profiles of the Future* (1962), British sci-fi author and futurist Arthur C. Clarke prophetically stated, "Advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic". Clarke proposes an interesting future for the state of the magical within a technologically-driven world culture. As things continue to speed up, do you think that magic will be revisited in a serious way by traditional thinkers like scientists and technologists?**

We do not think that scientists and technologists will be revisiting 'magic' because they will be too busy building the magical tools, the technological simulacrum of magic, that Clarke described.

The common concept of magic is usually imagined around the desire for transcendent omnipotent power and unlimited infantile wish fulfillment. If technology does eventually promise this level of unlimited material wish fulfillment, we can only hope that human understanding of ethical responsibility is equally advanced.



## The Pointy Hat

Though modern Westerners tend to identify this type of hat as the headgear of a witch, pointy hats have been a distinctive item of headgear of a wide range of cultures throughout history, in particular suggesting an ancient Indo-European tradition. Pointed or conical hats have also been worn by women of Lapland, by the Japanese, by the Mi'kmaq people of Atlantic Canada and the Huastecs of Veracruz and Aztec.

The brimmed pointy hat that is today a cultural 'trademark' used to identify the followers of wicca, was actually, some say, an invention of the Christian church. Legends state that in medieval days, "steeple-crowned hats" (derived from "steeple house", the Puritans' word for 'church') were placed on the heads of suspected witches before they were burned at the stake. It was hoped that this holy symbol of the church would help to draw salvation into their immortal souls.



## The Witch's Hat

### Classification

*Kingdom:* Fungi  
*Phylum:* Basidiomycota  
*Class:* Agaricomycetes  
*Order:* Agaricales  
*Family:* Hygrophoraceae  
*Genus:* Hygrocybe  
*Species:* Hygrocybe conica

Hygrocybe conica, commonly known as the witch's hat, conical wax cap or conical slimy cap, is a colourful member of the genus Hygrocybe (the waxcaps), found across northern Europe and North America.

The witch's hat is a small mushroom, with a convex to conical yellow-orange to red cap 1-5 cm diameter, often lobed, usually with a relatively acute tip and lobed margin, splitting as the cap expands, fleshy, thin, fragile, waxy, bright-scarlet-red, orange-red, or orange-yellow, sometimes tinged with greenish or blackish streaks, viscid, blackening when bruised or with age. Very occasionally larger specimens up to 9 cm diameter are found.

If you touch this mushroom it turns from red to black.

### How do you balance technology and magic in your various practices?

We keep magic in the realm of dreams and representation and limit our technology fetish to tools that measurably improve our lives.

### Whenever I look at an artwork, I like to ask what kind of spell is it casting, and if it is achieving the desired result. How do you assess your own success?

We usually choose a work of art that we think is exceptional, a work that has achieved a critical consensus about quality. We then position this outstanding exemplar as the basis of comparison with our work, and the benchmark for the evaluation of our success or failure.

Recently we attempted to make a painting as good as Jackson Pollock's 'Eyes in the Heat', 1946; this painting is in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice and we have seen it there several times. So far, after a couple of months of hard work, our painting could pass for a 70's bank abstract!

### What are your current personal fixations?

We have done a fair bit of research on Tarot and Tasseomancy, creating new images for our own set of cards & tea reading cups. We will be field testing our new Tarot application for the i-Touch this October at our *Skry-Pod* performance in Toronto.

For entertainment we have been reading some of the books that are the basis of the *True Blood* series and trying to imagine if the next evolution of the fang franchise might be vegetarian vampires? ✨



DEATH MAKES ROOM FOR BEAUTY