

# Peter Dykhuis: Crosshairs and Checkerboards

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Red Head Gallery  
5 – 26 February 2011  
Gallery hours: 12-5 Wednesday – Saturday

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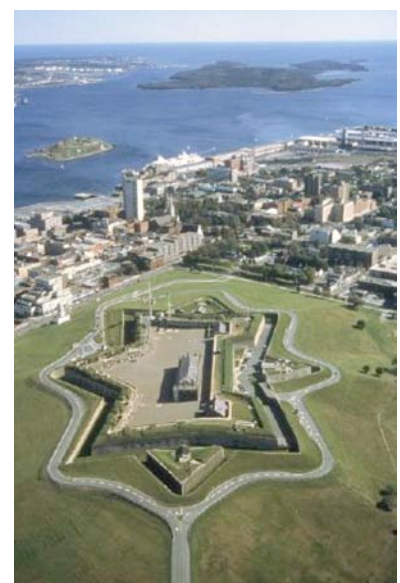
## Press Release:

Checkerboards with game pieces. Xs and Os and tic-tac-toes with crosshairs and scope visions. Organized in grids, the mixed media works in this exhibition were produced in the past five years and depict, for example, corporate logos, stock graphs, air force insignias, paper-based and digital map images – many with military pedigree and references.

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## Background Story:

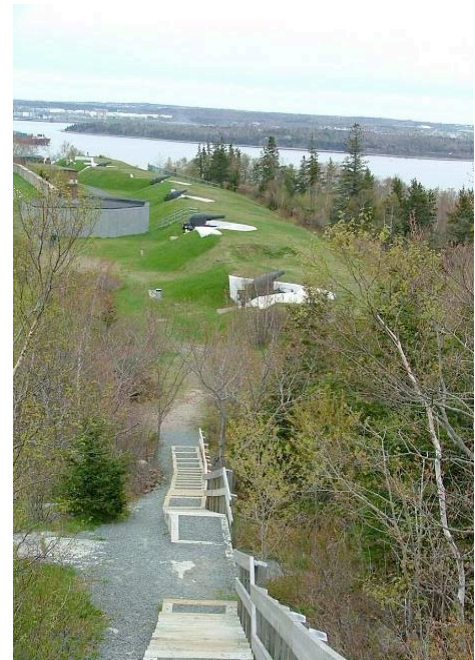
Halifax is a military town established in 1749 by the British after the siege and destruction the year before of the French bastion of Louisbourg in Cape Breton. (This is 10 years before the defeat of the French on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City in 1759 and well before the American Revolution in 1776.) Prized for its deep, ice-free harbour, the British built extensive fortifications in Halifax beginning with the fort high on Citadel Hill which was linked by the 19<sup>th</sup> century to strategic gun positions at Point Pleasant Park to McNab's Island, York Redoubt and Chebucto Head which collectively protected the inner and outer harbour. These outer fortifications, particularly York Redoubt and Chebucto Head with its commanding view of all approaches to the Harbour, were upgraded through the centuries and remained strategically active until the end of World War II due to German submarine activity in the open waters beyond.



Citadel Hill



map of historical harbour fortifications



York Redoubt

The Navy's East Coast fleet is stationed, repaired and supplied in Halifax. The Army is serviced by the supply depot of Willow Park. The Air Force base at Shearwater has constant helicopter activity although the daily patrol of the submarine-seeking Lockheed P3 'Orion' is now launched from the Greenwood base in the Annapolis Valley. There are often warships in the harbour, aircraft overhead, columns of army vehicles on the road engaged in training maneuvers and heavy military equipment shuttled about on the rail network that connects with ocean-going container ships. Halifax is buzzing when it hosts NATO exercises – controversy often erupts with the presence of American nuclear powered aircraft carriers that are not permitted to berth in the inner harbour.

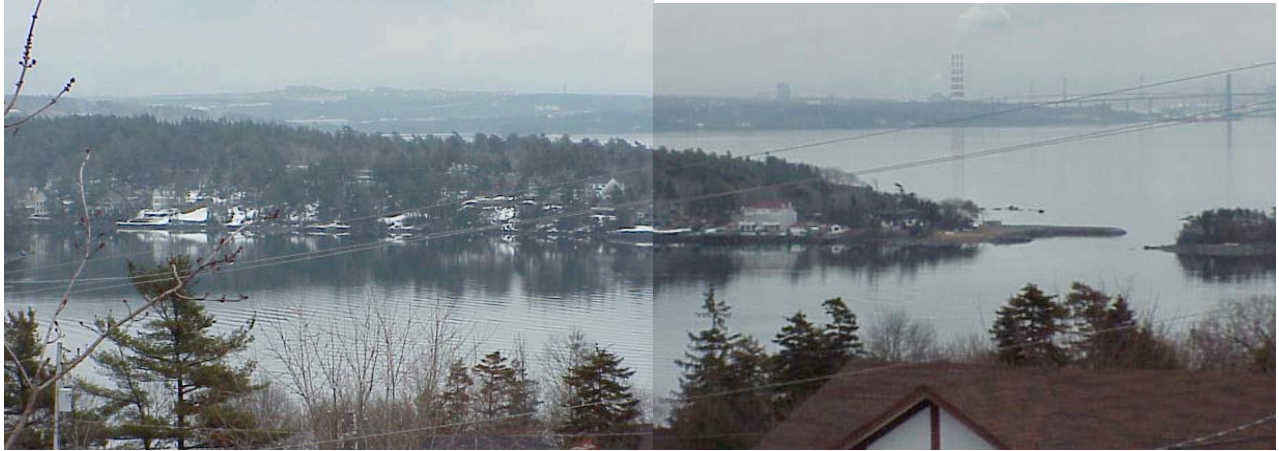


Maritime Atlantic fleet exercises

I moved to Halifax from Toronto in 1991. I immediately recognized the city as an example of a 'Pure War' environment as posited by the French architect and theoretician, Paul Virilio, where an entire economy is dedicated to the infrastructural support of the military so that it can remain in a perpetual state of preparedness for battle – even if a war or an enemy is not active or identified. The military and the layers of federal, provincial and municipal governments continue to be the largest employer in the region ahead of a very active medical and university sector.



I live in Bedford, formerly an independent town but now a suburb of Halifax that is located at the tip of the Bedford Basin. Our house, 31 Douglas Drive, is towards the top of an upslope of a hill and overlooks the entire Basin; indeed I have a commanding view of all shipping traffic and watch the naval operations with great interest from the comfort of our bedroom window. 31 Douglas Drive is also across the Basin from Magazine Hill, the site of the ammunitions depot for the Navy – our neighbourhood would certainly be damaged if a major explosion occurred. The Bedford Rifle Range, the small arms training facility for the military, is also a few kilometers away. It took me years to realize that the random 'popping' sound that I often heard in the distance was gunfire. I ride the bus to Halifax with Navy crews and eavesdrop on their chitchat.



view from the bedroom window: Shore Drive in foreground, Magazine Hill left in distance, McKay bridge on right

From 1916 to 1919 when he was the Principal of the Victoria School of Art and Design, now NSCAD University, Arthur Lismer lived in a house a kilometer away overlooking Fish Hatchery Park where the Sackville River meets the Bedford Basin. Lismer was a commissioned war artist during World War I who never went to the European theatre but recorded local naval activities as subject matter in his numerous paintings and lithographs. As Director/Curator of the Dalhousie Art Gallery, I am the custodian of some of Lismer's most important works produced during this period.



Arthur Lismer  
*Harbour Defence, Winter* c. 1918  
lithograph on paper  
45.2 x 64.0  
collection of Dalhousie Art Gallery



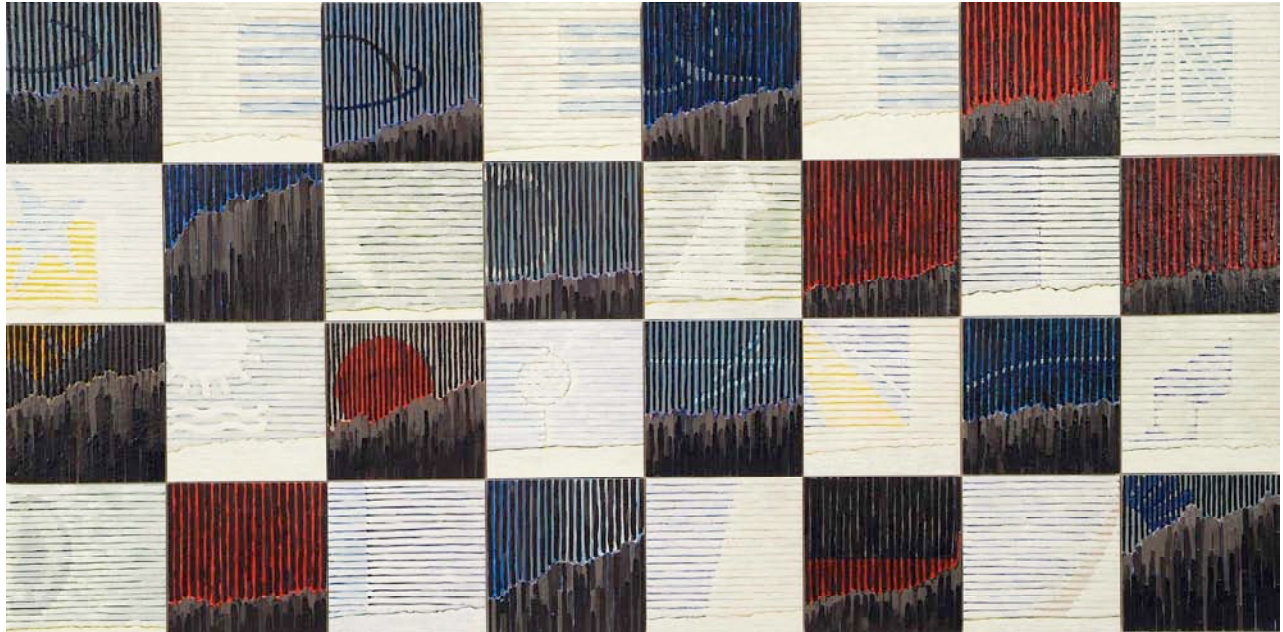
Arthur Lismer  
*Halifax Harbour, Time of War* c. 1917  
oil on canvas  
102.5 x 130.0  
collection of Dalhousie Art Gallery

Following the footsteps of my historical predecessor, I am a self appointed 'Pure War' artist who, through map-based projects, interpretations of stock market graphs and personal ephemera, locates my life within the military economy that I inhabit.

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## List of works with notes:

1. **War and Ethics** 2005  
encaustic on 32 panels, 30 x 30 cm each  
installation size varies



This project began as a comparison between the stock market profiles of corporate military suppliers and the value of ethical investment funds that did not include military interests in their portfolios. The initial research was compiled during a 2-year period from March 2003 to March 2005, the early days of the American-led war in Iraq and the Canadian engagement in Afghanistan. Through a formula whereby I matched disparate stock graph profiles into an equalized template, I was able to illustrate the disturbing trend where the value and growth potential of military stocks far outstripped the earnings income of ethical funds. (Please consult blue research binders at desk.)

Transposed into encaustic paint, the stock graphs form a horizon line of sorts where the black panels, representing military companies (such as Boeing, General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin), constantly illustrate a higher investment terrain than the ethical stock profiles (such as Domini Social Bond, Sierra Club Balanced Fund, Walden Social Balanced Fund). Unfortunately, investing in war enterprises generates wealth.

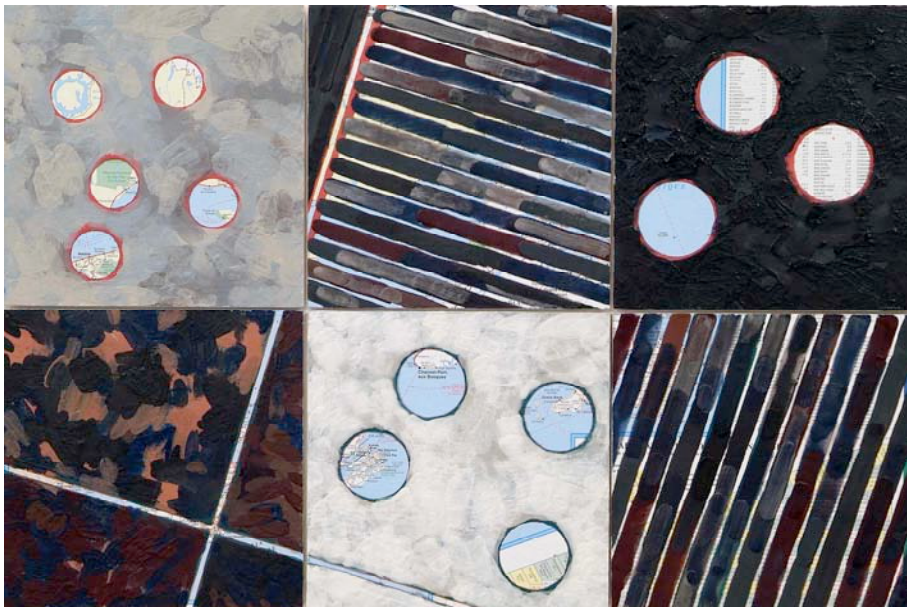
Lurking in each panel is a selected portion of the corporate logo or identifying field colour from each of the thirty-two websites that constitute the work. Purposefully pretty as a painting and bordering on abstract, *War and Ethics* alludes to the seductive and near invisible manner that the military economy is embedded within the larger economic landscape. *War and Ethics* is a highly codified history painting.



2. **Game Plan (Nova Scotia)** 2006  
encaustic, commercial map on 6 panels, 30 x 30 cm each  
60 x 90 cm installed



3. **Game Plan (Atlantic Canada)** 2006  
encaustic, commercial map on 6 panels, 30 x 30 cm each  
60 x 90 cm installed

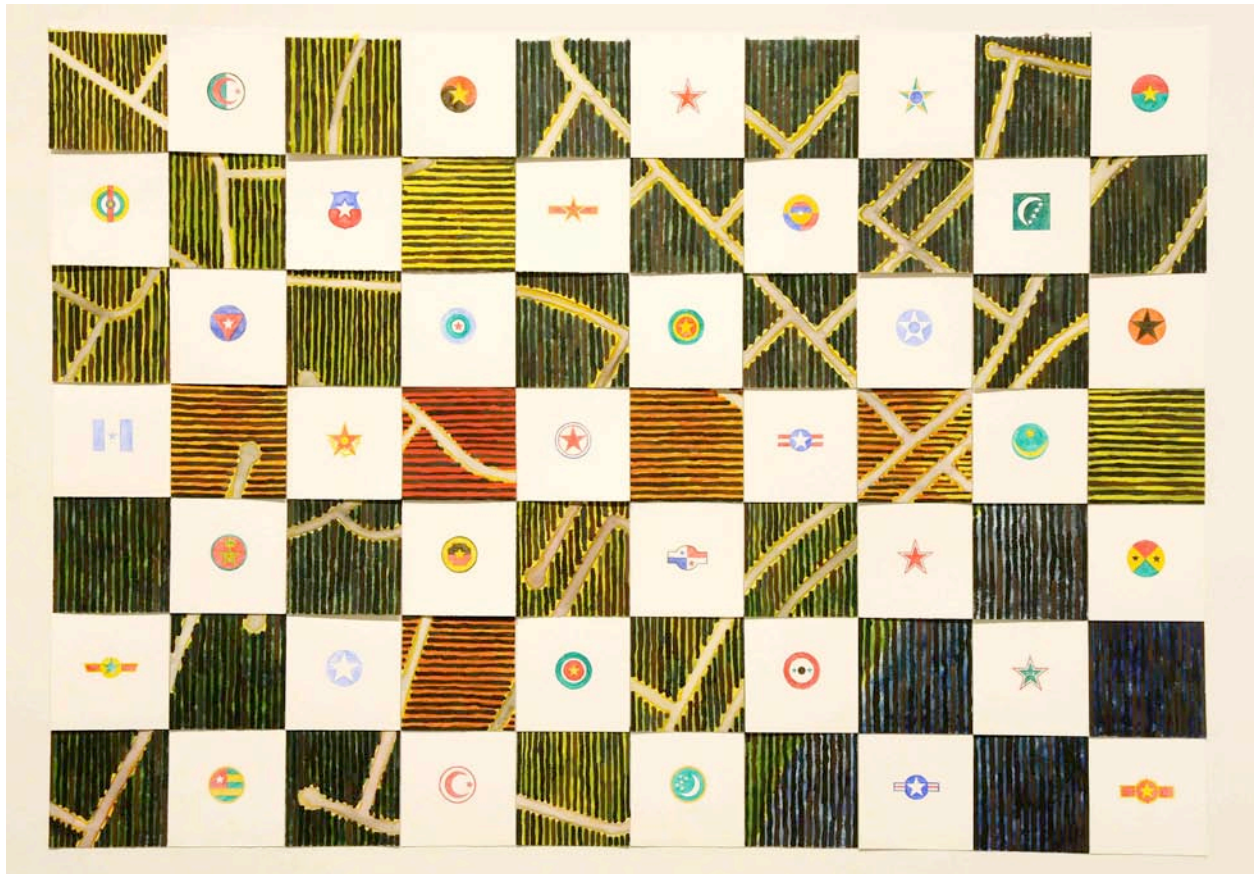


Painted on commercial maps, one the 'Doers and Dreamers' tourism map of Nova Scotia, the other a larger view of Atlantic Canada, these paintings both obliterate information and reveal what I choose to select to remains visible. The 'X' or crosshair motif in each painting is placed over my hometown of Halifax. The circular shapes reveal the scopes of other interests. Alluding to Xs and Os and tic-tac-toes, the mapped territory provides the field of play for other people's games. X marks the spot – I am here, I am a target, I am both identifiable and destroyable.

4. **Doers and Dreamers (Crosshairs and Scopes) #1** 2010  
encaustic, on paper, commercial map and envelopes on Sintra  
20.3 x 147.3 cm
5. **Doers and Dreamers (Crosshairs and Scopes) #2** 2010  
encaustic, on paper, commercial map and envelopes on Sintra  
20.3 x 147.3 cm
6. **Doers and Dreamers (Crosshairs and Scopes) #3** 2010  
encaustic, on paper, commercial map and envelopes on Sintra  
20.3 x 147.3 cm

Working again with the 'Doers and Dreamers' tourism map of Nova Scotia, I selected evident longitude and latitude coordinates to form crosshair 'markers' of sorts. The paint bodies that obliterate the circled zones are modulated to a certain extent and are experiments in balancing the relationship between the mapped figures with their expressive grounds. The 'X' and 'O' motif continues onto envelopes addressed to me both at home and work.

7. **Star Power (31 Douglas Drive)** 2010  
watercolour, encaustic on 70 paper panels, 17.8 x 17.8 each  
124.4 x 177.8 cm installed



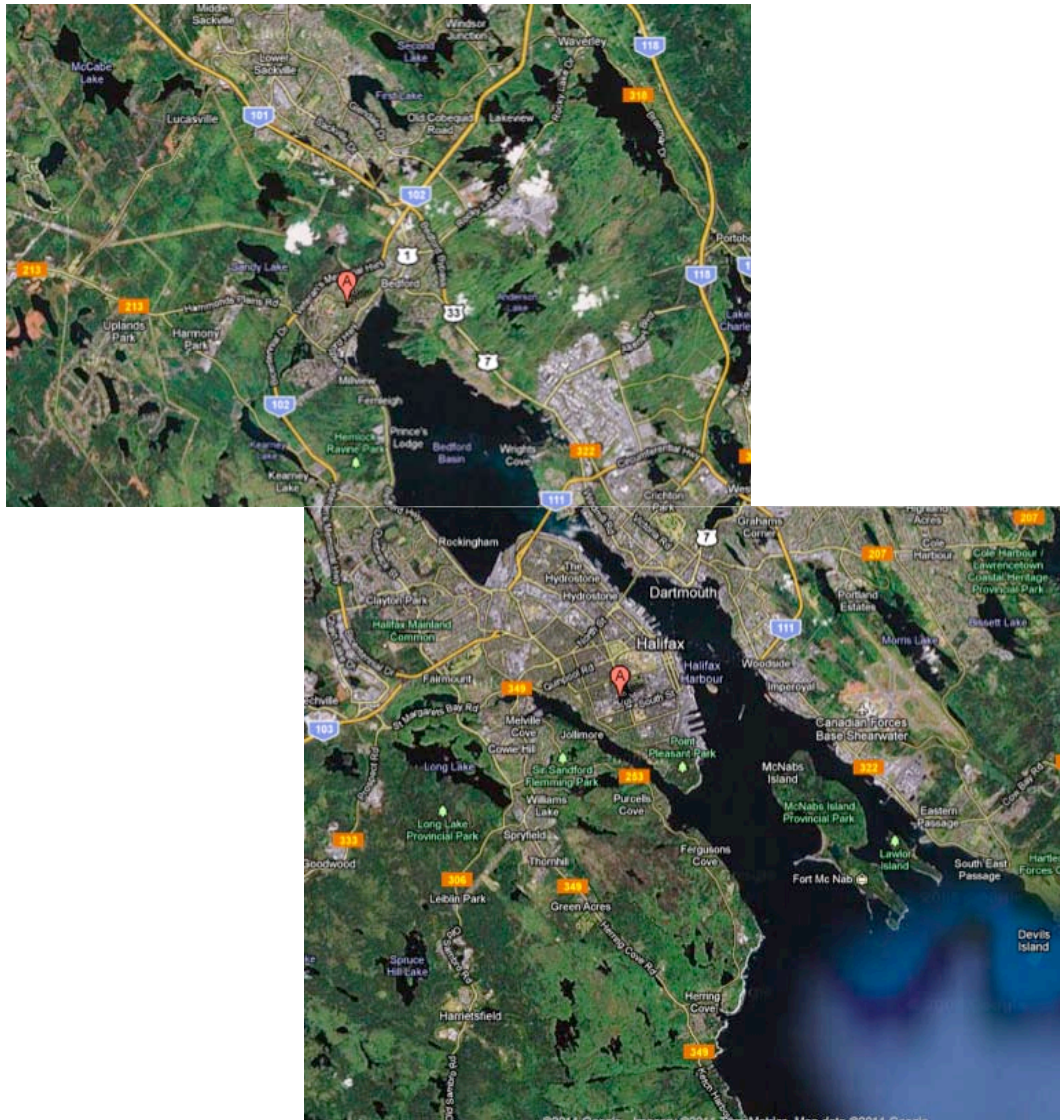


The 35 watercolour images in *Star Power* represent 35 alphabetically arranged air force insignias/roundels that incorporate the image of the star to identify the nationality of military aircraft. Symbolically patrolling the 'heavens' to assert control of the upper ground, I am perpetually reminded about how I am a potential target of this airborne weaponry. The red panel in the work marks the location of my house on a Google Earth map, a constant reminder of the level of satellite scrutiny available to the public. Seemingly benign as a domestic way-finding system, the military reality of Google Earth is far more sinister when considering the theories of Virilio – territory that is photographically 'acquired' from space is also destroyable by existing airborne weapon systems.

8. **DND and Me** 2011  
encaustic on commercial map, envelopes,  
lists and notes on 66 paper panels, 17.8 x 17.8 each  
181.0 x 222.8 cm installed



I took apart two street-guide map books of the Halifax region and created a single, larger two-dimensional map. Only squares that revealed sites owned by the Department of National Defense were included in my mapped construction of the Halifax Regional Municipality. Many military lands, revealed in scope-like circular apertures, were already indicated on the map.



Research image downloaded from Google Earth  
31 Douglas Drive, Bedford, and 6101 University Avenue, Halifax

Due to on-going personal research, I was also able to scope out additional sites of military offices, research centres and manufacturing plants in the region that belonged to corporate suppliers such as Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, Pratt and Whitney and L3 Communications. *DND and Me* is a Pure War map of Halifax that does not differentiate between corporate military suppliers and the sanctioned users of their deadly services and products.

One 'X' is on my house in Bedford, the other on my place of employment at Dalhousie University on the Halifax Peninsula. The checkerboard pattern is fleshed out with scraps of collected notes, documents and envelopes from both home and work that suggests another layer of my personal and professional relationships. The piece is a map of the relationship between my everyday life and the ever-present military culture that also shapes the world I live in.

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