

ANXIETIES

DECEMBER 7, 2016
– FEBRUARY 2, 2017

AUDREY DREAVER
SARAH FERGUSON
KEVIN MCKENZIE
LIONEL PEYACHEW
SYLVIA ZIEMANN

GUEST CURATED BY
CARMEN ROBERTSON



ART GALLERY OF REGINA



1



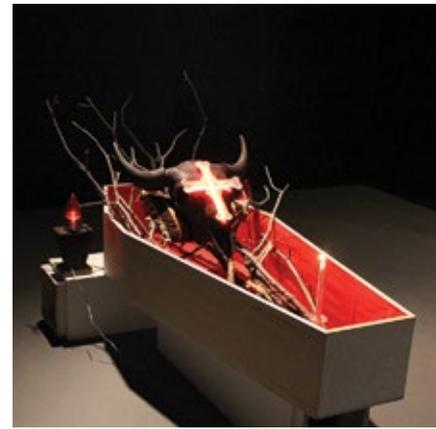
2



3



4



5



6



7



8



11



9



10

1-2 Sarah Ferguson, *Couple*, 2016, digital photograph, 28 x 42"; *Sucker*, 2016, digital photograph, 28 x 42"
3-4 Audrey Dreaver, *Dark Without Black*, 2006, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60"; *Two Aliens and a Duck*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60"
5-6 Kevin McKenzie, *Dead Apostle*, 2016, wood, terracotta, cast polyurethane, acrylic, LEDs, chrome, 84 x 72 x 24"
7-8 Sylvia Ziemann, *Shut In*, 2008, mixed media, DVD player, 16 x 20 x 20"; *Shut In* (video still)
9-10 Sylvia Ziemann, *Getting Ready* (video still); *Getting Ready*, 2008, mixed media, DVD player, 22 x 24 x 24"
11 Lionel Peyachew, *Abstruse*, 2016, canvas and plaster, 30 x 70"

The world today is restless and complicated, to be sure.

ANXIETIES

The world today is restless and complicated, to be sure. More than simple reflections of the hectic political or social sphere, we see around us expressions of horrors so disturbing and yet so compelling, that new aesthetic codes have taken root. *Anxieties* takes up some of the many ways that aesthetics of fear surface in relation to place in the work of Audrey Dreaver, Sarah Ferguson, Kevin McKenzie, Lionel Peyachew, and Sylvia Ziemann.

Through the gothic imagination, the unconscious is free to seep out into the world. Prairie Gothic tropes took hold artistically in Saskatchewan during the twentieth century, mostly confined to realizing settler experience in relation to a grueling and stark landscape. More recently, new layers of aesthetic experience make contemporary Prairie Gothic aesthetics a ready platform to explore a wider range of individualized trauma, carnal desires, and complex psychological states often manifested through concepts of the uncanny.

Artists on the prairies who expertly visualize such dark desires and gritty realities include Marcel Dzama, Bill Burns, Heather Benning, Gerald Saul, and Amalie Atkins.¹ They tend to experiment with what curator Timothy Long calls “rural ‘fairytale existence’” or “sinister innuendo.”² In *Anxieties*, colonialism, racism, sexism, and associated trauma reposition space and subjectivity in an exploration of the aesthetics of fear that intersects with the uncanny and contemporary Prairie Gothic aesthetics.

Sigmund Freud, in a 1919 study of fears in society, explained that tensions between the known and unknown, what he called the “uncanny effect” was a blurring between the imaginary and the real, that occurred “when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes.”³ Later, Jacques Derrida reconceived of the uncanny not as an either/or situation Freud identified, but as something both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, adding to the dissonance of the concept.⁴ Otherwise seamlessly hidden or naturalized in our world, it is only through ruptures in the everyday that we can unpack fears. Derrida’s reminder that, “(o)ne always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it” challenges us to examine perceptions of fear.⁵

The uncanny and the Prairie Gothic intersect in **Sylvia Ziemann’s** multimedia works *Getting Ready*, *Hostages*, *Kitchen*, *Post-Partum Delivery*, *Shut in*, *Garage*, *Home Invasion*, and *He Was A Quiet Fellow* that combine video and sound with scaled representations of houses. The emplacement of these works to (re)present an ordinary neighbourhood is undone when viewers voyeuristically encounter unexpected violence within. Mundane facades give way to something unhomely within commonplace domestic spaces. Ziemann subversively challenges viewers to recognize the menacing gothic landscape as urban, replete with geographic isolation and displacement.

When fused with colonial discourse, Prairie Gothic aesthetics expose the many layers of spatial and cultural displacement as found in the work of three Indigenous artists included in the exhibition. **Kevin McKenzie’s** *Dead Apostle* subverts the collective memory of colonial narratives and offers new forms of memorialization. The red fabric-lined coffin and dead branches cradle a stark matte black buffalo skull overlaid with an ornate, glowing crucifix. Together they conflate the complicated histories and realities of the prairie-scape. McKenzie’s beautiful art deco-stylized votives, repurposed taillights from a late model Cadillac, symbolically elicit uncomfortable conversations about the past, the present, and the future.

Audrey Dreaver’s *Dark Without Black*, a painting inspired by an archival photograph taken at the Holy Angels Boarding School in Ft. Chipewyan, Alberta,⁶ troubles the juxtaposition of a group of kneeling Indigenous children from the school, under the watchful eye of an authoritative priest whose mostly cropped body remains a visible presence. Focusing attention on the

wooden packing crate as icon, Dreaver comments on the blurring between the imaginary and the real. In **Lionel Peyachew’s** *Abstruse*, the haunting silhouette conceals but also confronts the complicated history of Residential School experience. *Contagion*, too, similarly evokes historic narratives that have prompted ongoing trauma. Such works serve as direct sensorial engagements with horrors that spill into the present and challenge viewers with empathic vision.

Dreaver’s *2 Aliens and Duck*, located within the blurring of the imaginary and the real is a seemingly whimsical painting. Upon closer consideration, the painting, devoid of tangible landscape as signified by the painterly background, presages wonderment. The effect is that of strange familiarity and confounding dissonance that reveals a rupture that demands renewed engagement with the collective experience of trauma.

Feelings of unease bolster the ongoing dance between the familiar and the unfamiliar in two large-scale photographs, *Alien* and *Fish* by **Sarah Ferguson**. Her self-representations confront naturalized societal notions of gender identity in the prairie landscape. Disorientating and alienating, yet reaffirming and validating, Ferguson queries gendered meaning assigned by society to the body. A pastiche of both sci-fi and film noir, Ferguson’s artworks (re)situate the seemingly unknowable body in uncharted space.

Visualizing narratives of trauma and fears, the art works in this exhibition reveal the instability of boundaries, histories, and rhetoric that shape perceptions through an updated aesthetic understanding of the Prairie Gothic. *Anxieties*, then, might be understood to portend complex woes and unsettled futures. Yet within the tensions of the always both familiar and unfamiliar, the imaginary and real, the works also disrupt and deconstruct notions of fear, and open possibility for empathy.

Carmen Robertson

1 See: Margaret Bessai, Review of “Prairie Gothic” *Galleries West Magazine*, 31 August 2011. <http://www.gallerieswest.ca/artists/previews/%22prairie-gothic%22-october-22,-2011-to-january-12,-2012-mackenzie-art-gallery,-regina/>

2 Timothy Long, “*Prairie Gothic*,” 2011-2012 MacKenzie Art Gallery, October 22, 2011-January 22, 2012. See: <http://www.mackenzieartgallery.ca/engage/exhibitions/prairie-gothic>

3 Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” (1919) in *Collected Works*, vol. 14 (London, UK: Penguin, 1990), 339 and 340.

4 Julian Wolfreys, “The Urban Uncanny: The City, the Subject, and the Ghostly Modern,” in *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties* edited by J. Collins, and J. Jervis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 168-181.

5 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976), 24.

6 Brock Silversides, *The Face Pullers: Photographing Native Canadians, 1871-1939*, (Fifth House, 1995). The image is of the Holy Angels Boarding School in Ft. Chipewyan, Ab. Provincial Archives of Alberta OB.735.

ART GALLERY OF REGINA

Anxieties

December 7, 2016 – February 2, 2017

Audrey Dreaver
Sarah Ferguson
Kevin McKenzie
Lionel Peyachew
Sylvia Ziemann

© Art Gallery of Regina Inc.
2420 Elphinstone Street, PO Box 1790
Regina, SK S4P 3C8

ISBN 978-1-927422-16-8

Director/Curator: Holly Fay
Guest curator: Carmen Robertson
Essay: Carmen Robertson
Design: Epic Art + Design
Cover image: Kevin McKenzie, *Dead Apostle*, 2016,
wood, terracotta, cast polyurethane, acrylic, LEDs,
chrome, 84 x 72 x 24"
Photographs: courtesy of the artists

Art Gallery of Regina
gratefully acknowledges
the support of



EPIC ART + DESIGN