LEESA STREIFLER: In Relation
April 18 - May 12, 2012

“Her House”, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 42”; 152.4 x 106.68 cm

“Primal”, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 54 x 72”; 137.16 x 182.88 cm

“Ingrained”, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 54 x 72”; 137.16 x 182.88 cm

The artist would like to thank the Saskatchewan Arts Board and the University of Regina for their support.

The Art Gallery of Regina gratefully acknowledges the support of the City of Regina Arts Funding Program, the Saskatchewan Arts Board, Saskatchewan Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture, & Recreation, SaskCulture, SaskTel, SaskEnergy, Saskatchewan Credit Unions, Greystone Managed Investments, Framemasters Gallery and Art Supplies and the Cathedral Free House.
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There is a rawness and sincerity about Leesa Streifler's figurative paintings in the exhibition In Relation. Within this new series, Streifler offers viewers an honest, intuitive approach towards subjects that are autobiographical in nature, unashamedly depicting the female body to address issues or thoughts on aging, depression, illness, sexuality, motherhood, familial relationships and childhood memories. Like Streifler's previous figures, these women struggle with the impact of life experience, are also depictions of bodies that defy social convention.

An exploration of the relationship between humans and animals is introduced in works, such as Bond and With Her. Bond offers a tender exchange between the artist and her standard poodle, Daisy, while With Her, with its x-ray-like imagery, seems to suggest that beneath the skin, we share more in common with animals than we may realize. Having engaged in research on animal/human communications, Streifler believes that animals possess an innate knowledge of the world around them and natural states of being or traits that humans can learn from.

Reflections on childhood memories are also introduced into this series of paintings, offering symbolic depictions of people and experiences that have impacted the artist's sense of self! Her work represents memories of her grandmother, someone whom she felt deeply connected to. Associative images connected to her grandmother float within the picture plane—in a shoebox, a pink dress in the floor plan of her house and a series of lines drawn on fabric. These references a negative memory from her childhood of being kept away from her grandmother, a body without a head, refer to the losses of memory we all experience when trying to recall details of a lost loved one. In the painting, the face and the sound of a voice may be lost to memory but the impression that person has made and the emotion of that association is still carried with us. Then there are images of a woman eating in solitude on a couch, addressing issues of body image, depression and anxiety. This act of comforting herself through satiating her desire to eat is emphasized through incorporating drawing into the painting, accentuating the hunger in the mouth. The intensity of the image is heightened through colour and the handling of figure/ground; the figure projects a sense of catharsis or resignation, while the background is activated with aggressive brushstrokes, seemingly swirling around her.

Streifler’s approach towards the canvaes is aggressive, confident, uninhibited and intuitive, translating into paintings that possess a sincere honesty. Here the personal is political. It takes bravery to face one’s past and present as revealed through a thoughtful process and to openly share one’s inner thoughts and struggles for critical engagement. Streifler admits that she has a driving need to depict her experience; seeing it realized in paint in a tangible form somehow completes her experience for her.

An article on de Koonings’s work recently discussed “how much painting is a physical thing,” how it’s one of the few media that illustrates so succinctly how “the brain is a part of the body” and consequently how “the body is intelligent.” In painting, you need them both. The visceral quality and sensuous immediacy of Streifler’s imagery, combined with her theoretical and experiential inquiries, makes this statement ring true.

Feminist theory has informed Streifler’s work throughout her artistic practice. Using the female body as an index or reference point, she has investigated socially constructed notions of the body as an index or reference point, she has investigated socially constructed notions of the body. Images that address illness, pain and aging, with curving spines, stretch marks, age spots, and figures that show the impact of life experience, are also depictions of bodies that defy social convention.

Painting as a practice is not what Leesa Streifler is known for. Although Streifler has worked with the medium throughout her artistic practice, she has only exhibited paintings. Her best known works are photo based images that incorporate and are transformed by drawing, such as in the Normal series exhibited at The Dunlop Art Gallery in 1998. This strategy of modifying images through drawing interventions reappears in this new series of paintings. While each figure is outlined, as a means of emphasizing while flattening the figure, drawing is then reapplied on top of the painted forms, introducing expressive lines and gestures, further altering, distorting and abstracting the figures.

Reflexives, such as though, also offer a sense of reflexivity, introspection, hopeful romanticism and tenderness.

Works, such as Mother and Attached are representations of motherhood, exploring the bond between mother and child. Psychoanalytic theory on motherhood has posited the mother being the primary nurturer, as the child’s most important ‘object’, especially early in a child’s development. In her own maternal role, Streifler acknowledges that her body is made available to her son, becoming an object of comfort and nurturance. The large image of the mother figure in Mother overwhelms the picture plane, signifying her as her child’s protector.

References to theories of the abject and grotesque carry over into this series, as reflected in the presentation of truncated or fragmented figures. Within this fragmentation, the torso or core of the body is usually favoured, thereby emphasizing the organs, such as the heart, liver and stomach, organs that represent or exhibit the repercussions of emotion physically felt in the body. Images that address illness, pain and aging, with curving spines, stretch marks, age spots, and figures that show the impact of life experience, are also depictions of bodies that defy social convention.

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Jennifer McGrath


2. From an interview with the artist on February 3, 2012.


4. Brian, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 54 x 32”, 137.16 x 106.68 cm

5. Bond”, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 42”, 116.8 x 106.8 cm

6. Attached”, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 42”, 116.8 x 106.68 cm

7. Jennifer McGrath

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