



Tammi Campbell, "Everything Must Go", commercial sign, 2011

## AfterLife

December 14, 2011 to January 27, 2012

**ART**  
GALLERY  
OF REGINA

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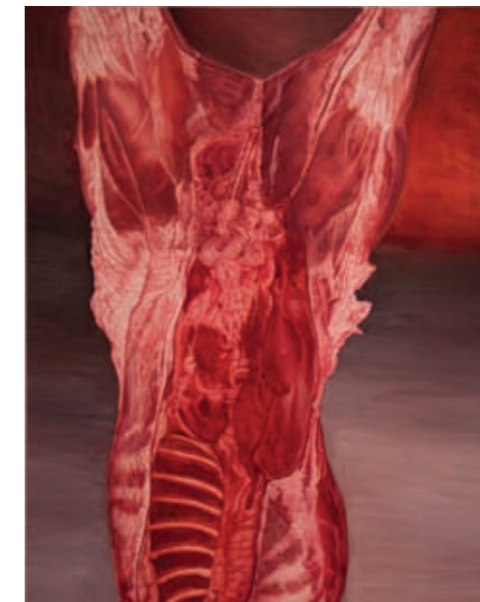
Art Gallery of Regina



Jude Griebel, "Night sky fader", oil on wall mounted wooden form, 24.5 x 18.5", 2011



Christine Ramsay, "Red-wing Aura" (detail 1 of 33), acrylic on canvas, 8"x8", 2010-1



Jennifer McRorie, "Carcass (Deer)", oil on canvas, 72"x48", 2011



Sylvia Ziemann, "A Glimpse of your Afterlife", wood, oil paint, fabric, electrical components, 18"x18"x31", 2011

Cover: "Steve Rayner, Tree on Allanford", bear skin, plexiglass, wood, air pump, 2007

# AfterLife

Death befalls us all.

*AfterLife* surveys a variety of responses to the very real fact of dying and the very obtuse and often ill-defined ideas we have about life after our deaths. There could not be a topic more vast or complex - one that artists across all cultures and geographies have embraced throughout history. But although the history of western art is replete with visual expressions of spirituality and the continuity of the self after death, this subject has largely been resisted, ignored and denied since the great cultural heave called modernism - a period characterized by the rationalist, progressivist and increasingly technologized 20th and 21st centuries.

This exhibition takes note of several contemporary artists who (perhaps unwisely) attempt to revive a conversation around a topic that many of us hesitate discussing. Disengaging from the theologies of organized religions that seem oddly antique at this point in time and engaging instead their own personal responses to the subject of the afterlife, they explore notions as diverse as transcendence, the spirit body, heaven, fatalism, birth and rebirth, regeneration, and rites of passage into a welcoming unknown or existential void: all the possible outcomes of our disembodied being after our final breath.

Referencing cautionary 17th Century Dutch *vanitas* still life images which depicted material wealth and abundance, **Tammi Campbell's** humorous installation deploys familiar forms of text-based retail signage as a way of engaging 20th century consumerist society. The ironic double *entendre* contained in the phrase "Everything Must Go" reads both like a bankruptcy close-out sale sign and a placard carried by a street corner doomsday cult preacher.

**Tamsin Clark** titles her cluster of small, intimate, soft-focus photographs *Memento Mori*, a Latin phrase that translates as "remember you will die". These images of dead field mice, moles, chipmunks etc. are as much reminders of the natural process of death (literally dropped at her feet by her cat) as they are metaphors for our own lifeless bodies after our own capture by death. Dovetailing the transition from life into death and from death into an after-life with the Polaroid photographic process itself, these images speak of a state of becoming as we transition from one state of being to another.

Hung as floating figures physically released from the gallery wall, the almost spectral paintings by **Jude Griebel** play with notions of the body, the dissolution of the body and the body beyond and outside of any spatial context. Playing with personal and cultural beliefs around death, with historical beliefs around the afterlife, with memory and presence, with the physical body and the spirit body, and with the mortal self and the immortal self, Griebel's ambiguous images disclose our physical 'un-becoming' and our subsequent reconfiguration.

Simultaneously a depiction of great horror and great beauty, **Jennifer McRorie's** blood red monochromatic painting of a deer dead - its body splayed open - fascinates as much as it repels us, perhaps because it renders us after death as mere body, as animal, as inert. Here, questions of both subjectivity and agency are addressed; here the body is no longer the vehicle for feelings, thoughts, beliefs. Who then was I? Am I?

Almost as if marking the inexorable pulse of death, **Christine Ramsays** thirty two paintings of dead birds shrouded/cradled/nested within the small square crypt of the canvas, are repetitively similar but are unique in their detailed specifics. Loss and sorrow are at the heart of these melancholic images - images that are both a grieving and a memorializing of each of these birds - and a recognition of each life pulse now rendered absent. It is via the gesture of painting that Ramsay (and, through that, we viewers) becomes an intimate of death and thus an intimate witness to these small ostensibly unmomentous lives and deaths. As humans we are alive in nature like these birds once were, and thus we share death *at the very least* with all other living things.

Based in taxidermy, **Steve Rayner's** *Tree on Allenford* goes further by suggesting re-animation. Here the hide of a dead black bear appears uncannily to momentarily take breath and thus take on embodied form. Prompting us to consider numerous problematic ideas such as the relationship of body to spirit, this work also inquires into our distant, technologized and even predatory relationship to nature. Rayner's *Bonfire*, a video loop projected on the ceiling, suggests a window opened to the heavens where what appear to be soft white clouds pass overhead in a big blue sky. Providing us with a meditative moment of infinite space and tranquility, what is recorded here in fact is billowing smoke from the burning of leaves - the almost-pagan annual fall nature ritual of transforming the organic world and returning it once again into the evanescent ether.

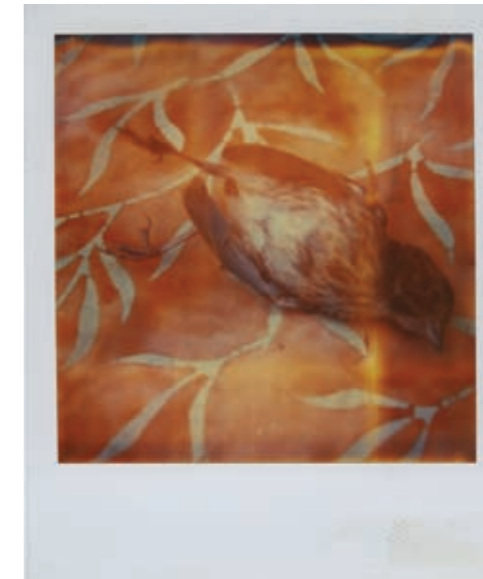
**Jean Sonmor's** three exquisite mandala-like paintings of natural materials speak to our physical and emotional intimacy - our entwining - with nature. One of these paintings is titled *All Earth is Burial Ground* and is described by the artist as depicting a "wreath of remembrance." It suggests our deep connection not only to the earth but to death - and to remembering its constant presence. The circle evident in all of Sonmor's images here not only suggests the wholeness and completeness which can be found in and through nature but more suggests eternal return - and in this way, immortality.

Reminding us of an old carnival arcade device that tells one's fortune, **Sylvia Ziemanns'** small tabletop sculpture is emblazoned on the outside with the question: "What Lies Beyond?" She fails to answer that question in this piece of course but does offer in the interior various options and choices that attempt to do so, sourced either from the world's great religions or populist but traditional 'new age' beliefs. Shifting from brightly colored on the exterior to darkly spooky in the interior which resembles a gothic corridor, Ziemanns' work plays with but recognizes the monumental divide between the known and the unknown - and that the answer to her question is ultimately, well, unknowable.

Always the semantic provocateur, **John Will** plays with the word and idea of "Nothingness" as an operating principle for making art - an art that he hopes will itself be meaningless. Of course even the lack of meaning is meaningful so his project is doomed to failure from the start. In the context of this exhibition the word play on 'nothing' suggests that our death is in every sense of the word a final termination and we are rendered into nothing, that the afterlife is nothingness and that all of this clearly means nothing at all. This kind of existential bewilderment is not to be equated with Buddhist nothingness. However given this artist's anarchic mindset, the word more reminds me of a song by the early 1960s conceptualist music group The Fugs who operated on the extreme edges of the underground 'beat' movement. Their song "Nothing" is nothing more than a repeated cyclical refrain: "Monday: nothing. Tuesday: Nothing" and so on and so on and so on.

Jack Anderson

Guest Curator



Tamsin Clark, "*Memento Mori*", (detail 1 of 16) Polaroid SX70 color photograph, 12"x12" (framed), 2011



Jean Sonmor, "*Earth is Burial Ground*", acrylic on canvas, 30x30", 2007



John Will, "*Nothing series*" (detail), acrylic on Arches paper, 22"x30", 2011