

## REFERENCE

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# CAMPBELL RIVER

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# ART GALLERY

## Exhibition Statement

### Suzo Hickey, "Like the Back of My Hand" Terra Poirier, "Are You Sure?"

*To find myself in a place suddenly sprung up from nowhere, a place bereft of memories, where the buildings are scattered over a huge area, a place with undefined boundaries, proved to be an overwhelming experience. I felt I was continually hovering in some no man's land halfway between the earth and the sky. My gaze resembled the glass surfaces of office towers, reflecting no one, just the high-rise buildings and the clouds.*

- Annie Ernaux, 1996

Suzo Hickey's exhibition confronts the Canadian West Coast landscape, locations personal to the artist while also recognizing her antecedents as a Canadian painter--the streets of Prince Rupert where Hickey grew up and the neighbourhoods of East Vancouver where she lives now. "Like the back of my hand" looks more closely at the power lines and ordinary houses in less-than-picturesque communities that comprise, in part, the Canadian landscape.

Hickey's practice is derived from the day to day. Her portfolio contends with queer mothering, issues of conformity and relocation, and is concerned with painting as process. Considered and material, the works result from complex layerings of acrylic paint beginning with red stripes and precise grids. This particular series of paintings, an entirely new suite created for the exhibition, revisits Canadian landscape painting as contemporary art.

The Vancouver-based artist has been working on the series since 2009. Hickey swore she would never become a landscape painter. What began as an exercise to paint again, the artist working from her bedroom window, painting what she saw. The painting process became a meditation in which the subject matter is always changing and accessible. Composed of traversing power lines, overlapping suburban architecture and particular weather patterns that define the coast, "Like the Back of My Hand" is concerned with place and home. Weaving through Hickey's landscapes one is confronted with place not just as setting, but informed by the interlocations of people and nature explored through the tradition of painting the outdoor.

*Where there is close vision, space is not visual, or rather the eye itself has a haptic, nonoptical function: no line separates earth from sky, which are of the same substance; there is neither horizon nor background nor perspective nor limit or outline or form nor center; there is no intermediary distance, or all distance is intermediary.*

- Deleuze and Guattari, 1987

Hickey captures how urban landscapes are liminal; infrastructure dissecting our communities, modes of phenomenological experience, connections, dislocations, extending beyond the frame. The sky's movement and mood, further within the composition of each viewfinder, swallow horizon lines. Streets taken from multiple vantage points, in varying weather and time states.

Hickey's landscapes imply the human, the artist's presence registered through repetition and the very materiality of the paintings, informed by her movement through landscape. Scattered within each frame are references to society, politics, and community, microtonally interacting with the Hickey's compositional aesthetic.

Canadian landscape painting is revered in art history, typically male depicting nature as chaste and often from a colonialist perspective. From a contemporary art viewpoint, the body of work exhibits landscape painting by a queer female artist, consequently acknowledging cultural history while also providing an alternative voice. "Like the Back of My Hand" acknowledges the landscape in a way that is not monumental but rather moved through, evolving, and decaying.

Images recombine and reconfigure landscape to compose the ephemeral. The object-hood of painting becomes memory – reference layered upon and dream-like. Repetition experienced in "Like the Back of My Hand", insipid, follows the viewer into Terra Poirier's exhibition, "Are You Sure?" One moves from worldly landscape to an internal landscape; object - floating shelf with vintage radio playing softly with three primary coloured books leaning against. This installation is void of whole figures, similar to Hickey's paintings, requiring a viewer's presence to make connections, the barest resemblances where the human is always implied.

*It surely matters what they were photographs of - that is, the displaced natural object that circulates in cut form as symbolic nexus of home, family, and the ritualized exchange of gifts.*

– Thomas Crow, 2009

Poirier's photography in "The Blanks" installation - a physical whiting out of figures, connotes absence, visual clues of form apparent, identities nulled. Poirier whites out each figure, presented as traditional photographs one might display in one's home. The sentimental representation of the photograph, however, is removed, summarily creating a dialogue of absence within the viewer. The work implies a void of familial distinction, an othering, of difference, inviting the viewer to mirror the absent figure, irrevocably linked, abstracted within the particularly selected and placed objects. The typewriter sitting before the crouched visitor is an object kitsch and play, a recipe card inviting the person to contribute to an evolving archive within the recipe box through the act of punching each letter. The viewer is able to tell their secrets to no one.

Interactivity in Poirier's work began with an earlier work in the exhibition that is displayed on the ground. "Likes to show off" is a fragmented photographic manipulation and found object collage which results from the artist asking strangers for captions to the photograph. Uncannily a common house rug, "Likes to show off," is the object that mimics the photographed figure. Manipulated and transferred onto wood blocks, layered and integrated with found objects, this juxtaposition of image and material suggests tension, conflict and resistance – a spatial chimera.

*Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship. A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images-of home and abroad, of past and present, of dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface.*

- Svetlana Boym, 2001

Memory and forgetting are irrevocably linked. A human body holds memory, and this installation guides the viewer's body through a curated space through boundaries which one may pass, re-thinking the authenticity of memory, self, and the familiar. The installation is fragmented, spare, inviting a dialogue between the observer and the observed, the seer and the seen. The exhibition demands human presence - from "The Blanks" to the fragmented child in "Likes to show off", to the suggestion of the human body in the very ergonomics of the chair, desk and lamp. The objects require the audience to recognize place, even generalized objects, as definitively designed for the human body in enviro, ab ovo (in place, in the beginning).

*This is kind of how we get through our lives: we tell ourselves stories so that what's happening becomes something we can live with. Necessary fictions.*

– Lidia Yuknavitch, 2015

[This Exhibition Statement has been written for two exhibitions held at the Campbell River Art Gallery from 13 August to 25 September 2015 by Curator, Julia Prudhomme. The Gallery gratefully acknowledges our exhibition sponsors, Penny + Roger Gosselin and Photo Tech, as well as our federal, provincial and community sponsors.](#)