

WINTER 2014

LUCIEN DUREY AND KATIE KOZAK: BABA'S HOUSE



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EXHIBITIONS | SHERWOOD GALLERY

Lucien Durey and Katie Kozak: *Baba's House*

Curated by Blair Fornwald

Presented in partnership with the Saskatchewan Prairie Light Photography Festival

JANUARY 18 TO MARCH 5, 2014

Artists Talk: Saturday, February 15, 1:00 pm, Sherwood Village Meeting Room

Reception: Saturday, February 15, 2:00 pm, Sherwood Gallery

RETREAT RETURN REPEAT

by Jenn Jackson, independent curator

In September of 2012 Lucien Durey and Katie Kozak went on retreat. They departed from Vancouver, British Columbia and ventured to Creighton, Saskatchewan. The decision to relocate developed out of a longing for a degree of seclusion and a resolve to withdraw. The duo traveled over two thousand kilometres from a city centre to a remote town site where they discovered their potential to physically and mentally drift from formerly-centralized practices. In occupying the geographical margins of the region, Durey and Kozak enabled a physiological response of meandering contemplation and reflection amongst the landscape.

Creighton, Saskatchewan is located halfway up the western edge of Manitoba, between the Nunavut and North Dakota borders. The history of the town site

was a central point of interest for Durey and Kozak. The namesake of the town is that of Thomas Creighton, an adventurous prospector who staked claim on the region's mineral resources in 1915. The town site became the home of the original producing mine for the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company and to this day, mining remains the town's primary industry. The notion of excavation, integral to the history and current economic and social fabric of Creighton, anchored Durey and Kozak's yearlong residency. The house that they occupied belonged to Kozak's Ukrainian-Canadian grandmother, Sophie Ostrowski, who generously vacated her home in support of Durey and Kozak's occupancy.

The family residence, a modest postwar home, served as a site for exploration and discovery. Sandwiched between an attic and cellar Durey and Kozak spent their free time organizing the home's chaotic archive of domestic debris into a semblance of material-based order. Photographs, recipe cards, scrap fabric, grocery lists, newspaper clippings, yarn, canned goods, bags of Gedo's old flannels, magazines, maps, keys, jewels, trophies, bullets, matchbooks, fishing tackle, decorative pysanky eggs, lotto tickets and a treasured accumulation of souvenir salt and pepper shakers were among the kaleidoscopic collection of familial material. All areas of the house were free rein. Durey and Kozak sifted through years of accumulation, the kind a great deal of our generations' grandparents have within the walls of their individual family homes. It was beneath the subterranean surface of collected life experience that Durey and Kozak produced the *Baba's House* photograph series.



Upstairs, downstairs, the garage, under antique furniture, atop shelves, boxes and bureaus were sites for source material. An immediate purge was among the new residents' first priority. The impetus was the idea that once documentation was completed, the object of affection could be deaccessioned, donated, or delivered to a newly-ordered cabinet of curiosity. A secondhand scanner was acquired and the haphazard meandering of objects was initiated. Durey and Kozak began compiling and contextualizing objects and ephemera. They spent up to seven hours a day producing digital slides of all things deemed worthy of such attention. Each day, the artists would upload one of these scanned object collages to the *Baba's House* blog.¹ The formula was diaristic and documentarian, with the castoff combinations collectively assembled. Formal aesthetic relationships forged ahead of nostalgic neglect. Their production was at times casual, accompanied with a beer or a bottle of homemade wine. Other evenings spiralled into labour-intensive and mentally exhaustive reconfiguration sessions. The ritual represented actual time spent in the house, a real-time digital registry of daily activity.

Durey and Kozak spent every day together. They were dependent upon each other. They were friends and foes, constant companions. Collaboration was a driving force. The *Baba's House* program was one of collection conservation and constant conversation. Durey and Kozak possessed perspectives that were parallel and paradoxical, friction was a frequent visitor. Their retreat status, although running a synchronistic trajectory, harboured key differences. The differences surfaced most often in the conversation of the material valuation of the home's contents. Durey, a new resident to the home and to Creighton, was



capable of subjective dismissal, whereas Kozak, a return resident, was bound by sentiment and childhood familiarity. Dedicated debate ensued as the duo sifted through the ambitious archive. Ostrowski was always included in decisions to deaccession or retain objects, and her opinion was of great inspiration. Following each scan, Durey and Kozak would solicit Baba's verbal response to the composition of her possessions. Ostrowski served as a surrogate historian, providing off-the-cuff remarks culled from memory.

The voice of Ostrowski is as apparent in the images as that of Durey and Kozak. Each scanned composition is an anachronistic time capsule of her lifetime. Her responses, which inform the titles of the works, and are transcribed verbatim on the blog, vary from pragmatic to introspective, engaged to careless, and frequently employ a sharp wit, underscored by frank transparency. A composition made with perogies and a photograph of a young man prompted:

“Ohhh, Andrew. That's not Melvin, is it? Has Melvin got curly hair? Cause Andy used to. And perogies! Yeah, I'm sure that's Andrew cause, see, even his face features are that of Angela's, eh? I never in my life thought that you guys would do something like this... come to Baba's House and pick up all the queer things.”²

Durey and Kozak's playful associations circumnavigate archeology. Their anthropology is openly biased and directly connected to their varied subjectivities. They describe the language of Ostrowski's responses, her cadences and turns of phrase as “Babaisms,” and it is through her descriptions that the history of the material is most alive.



Ostrowski's oral history parallels the pictorial and textual narrative of the stand-alone material. The original scans and their web presence are immediate and responsive, offering a minimum capacity for retrospective editorial activity; once the images were posted they were there to stay. Durey and Kozak's occupation of Ostrowski's home saw her collection shift in both value and meaning. The gentle organization of her home assigned alternate associations and historical resonance to the remaining material. The flux of representation, from organic archival chaos to organization via the production of systematized scanner slides, an online archive, a collection of images within a book, and a smaller collection of large-format LightJet photographic prints applied additional potential for archeological meandering. Each encyclopedic evolution provided an alternative perspective. The successive material iterations conspired towards a deductive narrative collapse. Context was revoked with final editorial pursuit taking priority in the limited selection of images printed for the exhibition, a process of extraction and aesthetic siphoning. Durey and Kozak omitted the incomplete, incoherent, and indecipherable and produced a concise final visual record. In the absence of their extended experiential lineage, the original desire to excavate comes full turn. It arrives back to an in-between place, one that appropriates anthropological aspiration onto the viewer, a place of extended time, a place of potential, a site for excavation.

¹ See <http://babashouse.tumblr.com/>.

² Sophie Ostrowski, description of Lucien Durey and Katie Kozak's July 20, 2013 *Baba's House* blog image, accessed on December 2, 2013, <http://babashouse.tumblr.com/post/55941424994/ohhh-andrew-thats-not-melvin-is-it-has>.

Artist Biographies

Lucien Durey is a visual artist and singer working in Saskatchewan and Vancouver. Durey holds a BFA from Emily Carr University of Art and Design and is an MFA in Interdisciplinary Studies candidate at Vancouver's SFU School for the Contemporary Arts. He has exhibited in Saskatchewan, Vancouver, Portland, and New York.

Katie Kozak is a Creighton, Saskatchewan artist of Métis and Ukrainian descent, whose work is a thoughtful blend of visual art and science. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of Victoria and attended Emily Carr University of Art and Design from 2009 through 2012. She has exhibited artworks in the Prairies and Western Canada.

IMAGE CREDITS

LUCIEN DUREY AND KATIE KOZAK *March 1 (Peanuts)* (detail) 2013 LightJet print face-mounted to acrylic glass

LUCIEN DUREY AND KATIE KOZAK *July 31 (Antoľb Káľo)* (detail) 2013 LightJet print face-mounted to acrylic glass

LUCIEN DUREY AND KATIE KOZAK *November 7 (Postcards)* (detail) 2013 LightJet print face-mounted to acrylic glass

LUCIEN DUREY AND KATIE KOZAK *November 17 (Tablecloth)* (detail) 2013 LightJet print face-mounted to acrylic glass



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