

Parastoo Anoushahpour
Faraz Anoushahpour
Ryan Ferko
Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill
Nicole Kelly Westman
like an old friend



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G44 Centre for
Contemporary
Photography

like an old friend

by Leila Timmins

Representations of landscape have dominated the short and contentious history of art production in Canada, proving a durable and persuasive component of the iconography of Canadian nationhood. Buoyed by the early support of the National Gallery—and by extension the Canadian government—images of a pristine and uninhabited landscape have been used to underwrite imperialist claims to land and to uphold colonial control. Turning away from these over-sung narratives, the works in this exhibition cast their view askance. Rather than contending with the weight of landscape representation as a nation-building project, each of these works circumvent this logic through intimate and sustained relationship to place. These projects are not about representation, but continued acts of care that stretch through time and across geographies. Situated in post-industrial or transitional spaces, devoid of human habitation or commercial use, these works are punctuated by absence—a hole left by industry, an abandoned mine, a recently resurfaced plot of land—containing traces of what was and fertile for what could be. Through economies of care, investigations into deep history and the creation of speculative futures, these works attempt to answer a question of what could be, re-infusing these absences with the persistence of human presence, unsettling inherited narratives and allowing a polyphonous understanding of our relation to place.

The exhibition takes its title from a work in Nicole Kelly Westman’s installation *Rose, Dear*. Scrawled across the wood veneer covering a lightbox, the sentence “it smells like sage out here like an old friend” is itself a borrowed and misquoted line, spoken between friends, further bent in its retranslation. These slippages of language, borrowed narratives, rumours and whispers, decontextualized and then recontextualized, structure Westman’s work. *Rose, Dear*, an ever-evolving project combining collaged video, found objects, chromogenic prints and email correspondence, is situated in the once-named Hamlet of Rosedeer, the title being a further linguistic slip and homage to the women that lived and died there. Located in the barren but topographically rich Badlands of southeastern Alberta, the area, now bearing the name Wayne, is part of a chain of ghost towns left by the demise of the coal mining industry. In the centre of town is the still-operational Rosedeer Hotel, a three-story wooden building rumoured to be haunted by the women who once worked there. According to legend, the town began to bear the name Wayne as a way to keep packages from getting misdirected to nearby towns Rose Bud, Red Deer or Rosedale. Now

named after a cook who worked at the hotel, the masculine stamp on the town foregrounds the history of the resource economy dominated by men, where women were often imported by men into the service of the workers.

Westman’s video presents an altered and reimagined vision of the place, composed of short vignettes shot across Super 8, slide film, digital video and animation, collaged together, broken and refracted, projected against an uneven surface and recomposed for the camera. The splitting of the images mirrors the splitting of time and the attempt to pull pieces from the past and merge them with the present. Embodying the spirits of the women who haunt the area, Westman and three friends traverse the landscape, reasserting their place among the old footpaths through the hoodoos and coulees. Images of the spectre-like figures are interspersed with shots sliding in from the sides of the screen: endangered prickly pear cactuses unpotted by gloved hands; barren landscapes unfolding from the rear window of a car; a woman, illuminated by headlights, walking barefoot in the snow; deer climbing over a mountain crest; a geode offering left on a tombstone; and a watercolour animation of text dissolving and reappearing that reads “I’ll hang in the guest room.”

The work gives no linear narrative or ease of access to the place, as if each new layer of text and image further conceals what is there. Yet, the traces presented evince a greater truth that exists just beyond the frame.

The work of artist Gabrielle L’Hirondelle Hill similarly makes visible forgotten histories and furtive presents, composing a relationship to territory defined by intimacy and proximity, over proprietorship. Situated within urban and industrial spaces, Hill’s companion pieces, *How Long Hav I Known You* and *Braided Grass*, document performative interventions in the landscape, transforming spaces through gestures of care. In the large-scale image *Braided Grass* we see a hillside tenderly braided into thin rows. The intimate act, like the braiding of a loved one’s hair, firmly asserts



Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, Ryan Ferko, *Former Customs Building, Cornwall Island, Ontario (Akwasasne), August 27, 2015, 2016*

Hill’s presence on the land, creating an encounter that ruptures the mundane urbanity of the turnpike circle. The imprint, however, is also fleeting, materializing an Indigenous presence while also pointing to its absence.

Absence continues to marks the area below the Grandview Viaduct in Vancouver, a place formative to Hill in her youth, which she continues to affectionately call the Waste Lands. Flanked by Pacific Central Station to the west and Clark Drive to the east, which stretches to the Port of Vancouver, the semi-abandoned CN rail yard marks the shift from a dwindling resource economy to a reliance on foreign imports. The area, once an inlet, was filled in by the railway expansion, allowing for the development of Vancouver as Canada’s frontier city. Now, with only a few passenger trains leaving the station a week, the area, mostly vacant and out of sight from cars and passersby, provides a certain freedom and anonymity unique within an urban environment.

In one of many interventions in the space, Hill formed the words “How long hav I known you” out of discarded materials left behind. The salvaged wood and scraps of plastic wire casing are traces of the parallel and hidden economies that operate in the space, repurposed as a gift and message to the people who might discover it. The words come from a speech Tseil-Waututh leader Chief Dan George gave in 1967 at a centennial celebration for Canada, in which he questioned the ownership of the unceded land the city of Vancouver is built on. The text piece speaks through time, blending Chief Dan George’s speech with Hill’s own, signifying not only the changing landscape but a durational gesture of care for the space and, by extension, the people who use it.

Looking more closely at the mechanisms of state control and the unstable logic of borders as a tool for establishing sovereignty, Toronto-based collective Ryan Ferko, Parastoo Anoushahpour and Faraz Anoushahpour’s project *The grass must have been mown*, blends archival material, oral histories and official state documents, complicating and investigating how histories and power operate through a landscape. Part of an ongoing series of work that delves into the specific social and political context of the area surrounding Cornwall, Ontario, the work begins with an image of the site of the former customs house on Cornwall



Nicole Kelly Westman, video still from *Rose, Dear*, 2016

Island, a small island in the St. Lawrence River and the westernmost part of Akwasasne, the cross-border territory of the Mohawk Nation. Taken from a car window by the artists visiting the area last summer, the blurry snapshot unknowingly captured the last recognizable moment of the building site—a pile of soil on freshly leveled ground—before the area was sodded over. The image, presented as a short video loop oscillating between two points of view never fully contained by the frame, emulates this state of transition and proposes a multivalent method of viewing.

Further exposing the complicated and contradictory layers of Crown and Indigenous sovereignty, the work continues to interrogate the former customs house as its subject, tracing the history of the building and conflict surrounding it. Employing archival material that bookend this history, including a 1969 *Challenge for Change* NFB documentary “You Are on Indian Land”, which captures the moments surrounding the building’s opening and a series of banal interior images from the 286-page report on the state-sanctioned demolition of the building, the work presents a refracted view of the mechanisms of control. Turning this system on its head, the artists have fed the archival images and footage through a series of surveillance technologies used to monitor large swaths of data to identify potential threats. Generating a script of possible hazards within the images, the program attempts to identify objects or persons through a series of algorithms and systems analysis. The resulting image and text breakdown and fall apart—words become unhinged from their meaning and objects shift in the room misidentified—exposing the failed and faulty logic inherent in the systems designed to restrict and control human access to space.

The absence at the centre of each of these works is not a human absence, such as in canonical Canadian landscape painting, but is instead a disruptive marker of persistent human presence. Together, the performative gestures in each of the works reconstitute an abeyant vision of landscape, creating a counter narrative to the histories of spatial dispossession. Rather than mapping a constellation of disparate events, the works coalesce to unsettle the ways in which power is articulated, and present myriad possibilities for convening within and inhabiting space.

Cover image

Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill,
Braided Grass, 36 x 24 inch
archival inkjet print, 2012

Back image (right)

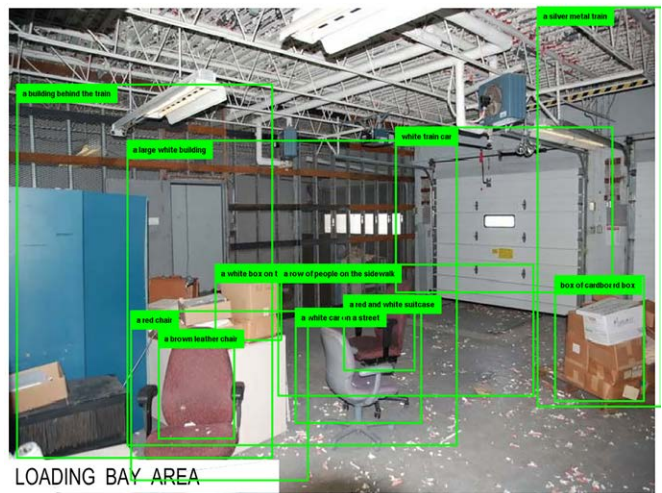
Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz
Anoushahpour, Ryan Ferko,
Loading Bay Area, Former
Cornwall Customs Building, 2016

Poster images (top to bottom)

Nicole Kelly Westman,
Rose, Dear (detail), 2016

Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz
Anoushahpour, Ryan Ferko,
WC Interior, Former *Cornwall
Customs Building*, 2016.

Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill,
How Long Hav I Known You,
36 x 24 inch archival inkjet
print, 2013



Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography is a non-profit artist-run centre committed to photography as a multi-faceted and ever-changing art form. Founded in 1979 to establish a supportive environment for the development of photography, Gallery 44's mandate is to provide a context for reflection and dialogue on contemporary photography and its related practices. Gallery 44 offers exhibition and publication opportunities to national and international artists, award-winning education programs, and affordable production facilities for artists. Through its programs Gallery 44 is engaged in changing conceptions of the photographic image and its modes of production.

Parastoo Anoushahpour, Faraz Anoushahpour, and Ryan Ferko have worked in collaboration since 2013. Currently based in Toronto, their recent film and installation work has been shown at Projections (New York Film Festival), Wavelengths (Toronto International Film Festival), International Film Festival Rotterdam, Portland International Film Festival, Media City Festival (Windsor/Detroit), Experimenta 2015 (Bangalore), Crossroads Festival (San Francisco), and ZK/UCentre for Art & Urbanistics (Berlin).

Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill is a Cree-Metis artist and writer from Vancouver, B.C., unceded Coast Salish territory. Gabrielle's sculptures and installations examine modes of land use, occupation, and ownership, as well as underground and black market economies. Her work has been exhibited at the TRU Gallery in Kamloops, BC; Gallery Gachet, Grunt Gallery, and Sunset Terrace in Vancouver; and also at Get This! Gallery in Atlanta, GA. Gabrielle's work will be featured in the upcoming exhibition *To Refuse/ To Wait/ To Sleep*, at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery in Vancouver.

Nicole Kelly Westman is a visual artist of Métis and Icelandic descent. She grew up in a supportive home with strong-willed

parents—her mother, a considerate woman with inventive creativity, and her father, an anonymous feminist. Her work culls from these formative years for insight and inspiration. Existing beyond the binary definitive of a specific medium, Nicole Kelly Westman, has had the pleasure and privilege to be curated into exhibitions by remarkable females including: Peta Rake, Kristy Trinier, Kimberly Phillips, Ginger Carlson, Leila Timmins and cheyanne turions. Westman holds a BFA from Emily Carr University and is the current Director of Stride Gallery.

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