



SUMMER 2016

Abbas Akhavan and Marina Roy: Neighbours



Abbas Akhavan, *Untitled Garden*, 2009/2016, cedar hedge
Abbas Akhavan and Marina Roy, *No Neighbours*, 2010/2016, mixed media
Photo: Don Hall

ABBAS AKHAVAN AND MARINA ROY: NEIGHBOURS

JUNE 30 TO SEPTEMBER 3, 2016

CURATED BY JENNIFER MATOTEK, DIRECTOR/CURATOR

Crossing the Hedge

BY JENNIFER MATOTEK, DIRECTOR/CURATOR

Hedges remind me of a time when something private happened to me. We use hedges for privacy, to create the idea of indoor spaces outdoors. We use hedges for division, to separate our property from our neighbours, because we don't want them to see what we are doing. The root of the word "house," according to some etymologists, comes from "to hide" and is shared as a root for other words like "host," and "hotel," but also "hospital," "hostile," and "hostage." Home, the media teaches us, is a place where we are supposed to be safe and loved. But it is also a place where we learn what hurts us, and where we hurt, and where we learn how to hurt others. Some of the most brutal "enhanced interrogation techniques" of the contemporary era (used in Guantanamo Bay, for example) tend toward the use of domestic items, such as water and cloth – indoor and outdoor domestic items not unlike some of the materials which comprise the first part of Marina

Roy and Abbas Akhavan's site-specific installation at Central Gallery.

In recent years, the home has been a source of economic trauma for many families across North America. The 2008 subprime mortgage crisis forced many Americans out of their homes, emptying out many of the hardest hit cities, such as Detroit, by the thousands. A few years later, Hurricane Katrina destroyed thousands of people's homes in New Orleans. It is important to note that these two traumas largely impacted the lives of persons of colour and those who were lower-income, and that it was the government who failed to protect them. When people left their homes, nature took over – both Detroit and New Orleans are now overrun by thousands of stray dogs, likely generating scenes reminiscent of the 18th century building taken over by animals in Roy's cel animation



Abbas Akhavan and Marina Roy, *No Neighbours*, 2010/2016, mixed media
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Apartment, where rooms are in decay and sins abound: gluttony, vanity, pride, and even murder.

When I first moved to Regina, I was fascinated by my neighbours, having never owned a house before. Some were, and are, warm, welcoming, and funny while others are downright odd, and seem to have an invisible “no trespassing” sign on their yard. Over the three years I have lived here, things that at first seemed innocuous gradually took on a more ominous tone. When I noted to my husband that I was pleased to see our neighbours finally replaced their old garage with a new white structure, I was horrified to learn that the former garage was the site of domestic abuse which resulted in murder and a jail sentence for the husband. When I see the garage now, rather than pleased, I feel fearful, and the reptilian part of my brain takes over.

In response to stress and fear, humans sometimes respond inappropriately – laughter is not an uncommon side effect of fear for example, which you can witness in psychology experiments such as the Milgram experiment. During the Milgram experiment, white male participants were asked to torture other unseen (and secretly, non-existent) participants in another room. The motivation for the experiment was, in part, to understand the Holocaust – to question how decent people could behave so inhumanely when goaded by authority, rather than stop the screams of fellow men.¹

When we hurt people, and do so barbarically, which part of the brain are we using? Is it the “civilized” part which drove settlers to build homes and cities to raise our families in? Or is it the emotional, reactive, reptilian part that encroaches negatively upon our civilized, domestic life?

To cross a private hedge is to trespass.

¹ Milgram Experiment, Big History NL, Threshold 6, YouTube video, published March 19, 2013, accessed May 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOYLCy5PVgM>



Marina Roy, *Apartment*, 2008, animation
Abbas Akhavan, *Untitled Garden*, 2009/2016, cedar hedge
Photo: Don Hall



Marina Roy, *Apartment*, 2008, animation. Image courtesy of the artist.





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COVER IMAGE

Abbas Akhavan and Marina Roy, *No Neighbours* (detail), 2010/2016, mixed media. Photo: Don Hall.



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