



SPRING 2017

Christopher Campbell Gardiner: Riddance



Christopher Campbell Gardiner, *Riddance* installation view. Photo: Don Hall.

CHRISTOPHER CAMPBELL GARDINER: RIDDANCE

APRIL 1 TO JUNE 14, 2017

CURATED BY WENDY PEART, CURATOR OF EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

A Snake Who Eats its Tail

BY WENDY PEART, CURATOR OF EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

It is a paradox. The image of a snake eating its tail, or an *ouroboros*, can be traced to Ancient Egypt and has subsequently slipped into Western usage through Greek magical traditions. It is a vivid image: violent and self-sacrificing, one turning in on itself, becoming all and becoming nothing. As a metaphor, it points to the cyclical nature of life itself, the persistent state of suffering, and the promise of renewal.

Christopher Campbell Gardiner's art practice mirrors this metaphor. I have worked with Chris on several occasions. He is a deep thinker and a person of admirable complexity and humanity. Our conversations have always felt like a form of meditation and mediation. Over many cups of coffee we have talked about his life, his ideas, and his work, which, for nearly 25 years, has focused on meticulous practices of wrapping, sealing, and containing objects to the point of dense concealment.

The project started as an effort to exonerate what he considered failed art projects made in art school. This ritualistic, meditative practice has resulted in minimally presented, yet highly complex "anxiety containments," works which house objects that for Gardiner, represent "longing, deceit, loss, disappointment, guilt, depression, failure, miscarriage, rejection..." and, ultimately, anxiety.¹ The objects tucked away inside his encasements are entirely discreet and undeclared, known only to Gardiner himself. The private and meticulous acts of wrapping the objects in cotton, securing them in wooden cases lined with lead, re-wrapping with more cloth, generously and repeatedly stitching the cloth with thread, and applying countless layers of gesso and acrylic paint serve to transform the authority of the objects through a form of bound stasis, in what he calls "frozen bonfires of anxiety."² Herein exists one of



Christopher Campbell Gardiner, *Riddance* installation view. Photo: Don Hall.

Small white informational label on the wall to the left of the artwork.





Christopher Campbell Gardiner, *For Eric - Reveal Conceal*, 2009-2010, Eric Cameron's anxiety (undeclared and unknown to the artist), wood, beeswax, screws, industrial gauge felt, reclaimed cotton, Braille embroidered (spell enchanted) surface, gold metallic latex paint, and varnish, housed in protective case (Eric's name embroidered into lid flaps) of canvas, lining material, and cotton thread. Photo: Don Hall.

many contradictions in Gardiner's work.

Gardiner likens his processes to a form of alchemy. By encasing objects that are steeped in personal suffering within humble and basic materials (cotton, beeswax, felt, wood, lead and other metals, screws and threads) and finishing them with refined, minimal and sometimes cryptic surface treatments, he transforms base materials into sacred vessels. Spending countless hours, and sometimes years on an individual piece, Gardiner works alone in a reclusive, introverted state involving extreme focus, repetition, and care. While he wrestles with pervasive emotional and psychological forces, Gardiner's extreme attention conjures a reconciliatory and emancipating state of being. His work, *A Shaman On The Other Side Of The World – Shaping An Unavailable Prayer*, speaks to this transformation. Much like a minimalist painting, it commands an objective reading with its simple but bold formal presentation, but in practice, it is something more akin to a spiritual reliquary. The mass of the work, the gentle winding weft of the surface, and the majestic colour transform its contents into a sacred object – trauma beheld as gold. Like the ouroboros who consumes itself to survive, Gardiner devours his own anxieties in order to inure his suffering.

A stark departure from this solitary, self-reflexive practice began in 2009, when Gardiner created a work dedicated to fellow artist and kindred spirit, Eric Cameron, whose art practice also involves the meticulous covering of objects. In his work, *For Eric - Reveal Conceal*, Gardiner masked an anxiety

object selected by and only known to Cameron. Gardiner explains:

It is probably the most finished work in that it doesn't contain my own anxieties. It may be one of the most perfect of my works for this reason in that I facilitated the opportunity to arrest, indifferently, an anxious item(s). This may be the solution I have been seeking all of this time.³

Riddance expands upon Gardiner's desire to mitigate the anxieties of others through his work. For this exhibition, Gardiner has asked community members to submit an object that triggers or symbolizes an anxiety, or a hand-written letter describing a personal anxiety. Gardiner will wrap and layer these objects in the gallery, for the duration of his exhibition. While working, Gardiner will encourage visitors to watch and engage with him, as a way of "bridging of public consciousness and private ritual"⁴. Through this communal gesture and meaningful exchange, Gardiner hopes that he can facilitate an unburdening – a riddance – of trauma, fear, and anxiety held deep inside of others living in his community.



Christopher Campbell Gardiner, *Riddance – Part One* (in progress), 2017, anxiety based/sealed letters submitted by the public, wood, beeswax, nails, fire retardant lining, felt, cotton, thread, gesso, gold latex paint, latex varnish. Photo: Don Hall.





Christopher Campbell Gardiner, *Riddance – Part One* (in progress), 2017, anxiety based/sealed letters submitted by the public, wood, beeswax, nails, fire retardant lining, felt, cotton, thread, gesso, gold latex paint, latex varnish. Photo: Don Hall.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Christopher Campbell Gardiner received his BFA from Alberta College of Art in 1995 and MFA from the University of Regina in 1998. He has been the recipient of numerous grants and has exhibited throughout Western Canada. His work is in the collection of the Saskatchewan Arts Board, the University of Regina President's Art Collection and other private collections.

¹ Christopher Campbell Gardiner, Artist Statement, 2016.

² Ibid.

³ Christopher Campbell Gardiner, email to David Garneau, May 23, 2011, quoted in David Garneau, *Reveal Conceal* (Moose Jaw and Swift Current: Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Swift Current, 2011), 53.

⁴ Gardiner Artist Statement.



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COVER IMAGE

Christopher Campbell Gardiner, *Riddance – Part One* (in progress), 2017, anxiety based/ sealed letters submitted by the public, wood, beeswax, nails, fire retardant lining, felt, cotton, thread, gesso, gold latex paint, latex varnish. Photo: Don Hall.



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