

SARAH CIURYSEK

Sarah Ciurysek is a Canadian artist working mainly in photography, video, and installation to examine our relationship to the ground. The artwork typically consists of large-scale colour photographs of soil, grass, fields, and floors; these works reference graves, death, life, nourishment, history, archeology, and rural sensibilities and concerns.Sarah was raised in northern Alberta and continues to make much of her work there. She trained at Emily Carr University of Art + Design (BFA 2003), Parsons The New School for Design, and Concordia University (MFA 2007). Her work has been exhibited across Canada, in the UK, and in South Africa. She has participated in national and international residencies and has been the recipient of Canada Council and Alberta Foundation for the Arts grants. She is an Assistant Professor at the School of Art, University of Manitoba.

ELVIRA FINNIGAN

Elvira Finnigan is a multi-media artist who works in installation, performance, video and photography. Her work, which is based on a process of salt brine crystallization, focuses on ideas of hospitality, preservation and entropy. Finnigan’s work has been exhibited in Canada, the US, and Japan. Recent exhibitions include *Lateral Symmetry*, Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon, *MAWA 30th Anniversary exhibition*, MAWA, Winnipeg, *memory, awareness, expectation*, Platform Gallery, Winnipeg, *Festin et Conséquences*, (*Feast and Aftermath*), Centre Cultural de franco-manitobain, Winnipeg.

TRACY PETERS

Tracy Peters is a Winnipeg-based artist who uses photography, installation and video to explore connections between lived-in structures, the natural environment and the human body. Many years of darkroom practise initiated her research into fragile materials and the emotive power of surfaces, but her recent site-specific installations have expanded her investigation into temporary dwellings and the ways that architecture functions as a living system. In her process, Tracy’s works to evoke an experience that moves beyond the physical boundaries of architecture. Her works have exhibited at The Pavilion Gallery, Martha Street Studio’s Project Room, aceartinc, and in local, national and international group exhibitions.

BASMA KAVANAGH

Basma Kavanagh is a visual artist, poet and letterpress printer based in Brandon, Manitoba. Her work has been exhibited across Canada, the US, and in the Arabian Gulf. She has been an artist in residence at the Banff Centre, the Minnesota Center for Book Arts, and the Penland School of Craft. To make her work, she spends time outdoors, attending to the organisms and forces that animate our living world, the diversity and complexity of life. Basma’s work has evolved from drawn or painted portraits of plants and fungi to more contemplative and rhythmic arrangements of organisms and natural forms in a variety of media. Basma is convinced that the forms themselves have something to communicate, conveying elemental, unlanguage truths about our relationship to the earth and other living things, some evidence of ecologist and philosopher David Abram’s assertion that “we are only human in contact ... with what is not human”.



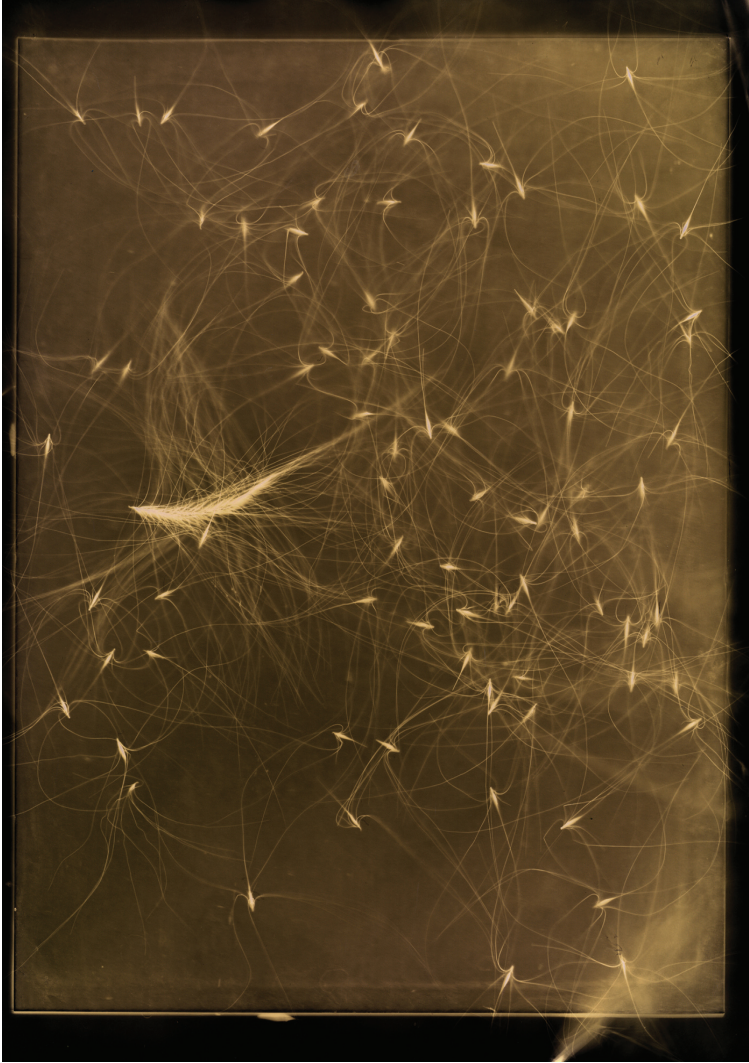
Sarah Ciurysek, *Landscape*, Toner photographs printed on Tyvek 9' x 8', separated in 3 panels, image courtesy of the artist.



Lateral Symmetry, installation view at the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, 2014, photograph by Kevin Bertram.



Elvira Finnigan, *Feast and Aftermath: White Wine Glass*, Wine glass, salt crystals, 2013, image courtesy of the artist.



Tracy Peters, *Lumen 31 (detail)*, Lumen print on glass, 8.5”x11”, 2012/2014, image courtesy of the artist.



Basma Kavanagh, *Untitled No. 7*, Ceramic, metal, found wood, 2014, dimensions variable, photograph by Tracy Peters.



Tracy Peters, *Layers (SHED Project)*, Video (00:55), 2012, video still courtesy of the artist.

LATERAL SYMMETRY
SARAH CIURYSEK
ELVIRA FINNIGAN
BASMA KAVANAGH
TRACY PETERS

CURATED BY NATALIA LEBEDINSKAIA
SEPTEMBER 4 – OCTOBER 25, 2014

ART GALLERY OF SOUTHWESTERN MANITOBA
710 ROSSER AVENUE, UNIT 2
BRANDON, MANITOBA, R7A 0K9
www.agsm.ca

Lateral Symmetry brings together four Manitoba women artists whose practices respond to Rosemary Kowalsky’s (1920-2006) work in concurrent exhibition *Endangered Species*. Both exhibitions focused on the blurred boundaries between nature (whether wild or cultivated) and its human inhabitants. At the core of the artists’ practices is a focus on processes that foreground the inevitability of decay and the porous margins between natural and human domains. In some works, such as Tracy Peters’ *SHED* project and Elvira Finnigan’s *Saltwatch* experiments, objects and sites have undergone guided transformation that has been temporarily stalled for the exhibition. The artists’ attempts at controlling these natural and chemical processes are always met with their essentially unpredictable nature, such as in Basma Kavanagh’s colony of miniature pots that both suggest and are built to host living things. Meanwhile, Sarah Ciurysek’s towering photograph of layered earth situates the viewer underground, bringing to the fore the simultaneously disorienting and grounding depth of the soil beneath.

Symbiotic, conflicted, invasive, and fluid, relationships between species in works by Ciurysek, Finnigan, Peters, and Kavanagh bring attention to the necessity to look beyond the human/nature divide. They require different definitions of agency (as capacity to act), and shift away from looking at humans as central to these actions.

On the outskirts of Winnipeg, the residential community of Charleswood is undergoing drastic changes. Fields on the edge of the town are being consumed by suburban development, as the semi-rural way of life gives way to subdivisions. In the midst of these changes, an old wooden shed sits in a fallow field, on a property where nine children were raised by a family of market gardeners. Now abandoned, the structure was once used to store grain, and is now home to barn swallows, various animals, insects, and most recently - an invasion of foxtail barley. Tracy Peter’s *SHED* project is an encounter with this unassuming structure.

Peters is interested in the parallels between invasive interspecies competition, prolific reproduction, and suburban housing.¹ The foxtail barley moves through these landscapes as an invasive species, paralleling the encroaching development. Carried by the wind across fallow fields, it reproduces prolifically. The golden clouds made up of hundreds of seeds occupy corners of the shed and cover the nearby forest floor. Peters responded to them through photographs that not only depicted but mirrored the path of these seeds. She photographed the forest floor, printed the image on vellum, then cut it into strips and wove them like a basket through slats of the shed walls, leaving it to be shaped by the architecture, insect bites, wind, and rain. The strips of vellum, once removed, formed installations including *Unusual Migration (SHED Project)* (2012), which echoed the accumulation of seeds in the corners.

The shed is a habitat for the swallows and the foxtail barley, under threat from the encroaching suburban sprawl. The swallows in *Layers* (2012) are already ghostly. Footage of their fluttering wings is interspersed with images of scraping their

droppings. While the swallows might look like ghosts, hinting at their future absence, they are very much alive; the abrasive sound of scraping their waste from the floorboards affirms their presence.

Peters’ photographic and sculptural interactions with the shed bring to the fore its permeability. Its porous boundary is what allows for the interspecies encounters at the core of Peters’ work: the swallows, foxtail barley, insects, and animals. While she does not orchestrate their movement, her interactions with the shed play a part in how the site is inhabited as she becomes part of the ecosystem. The extension of that encounter is how the habitat is contained in the gallery space. The foxtail barley seeds are trapped under a Plexiglas case, their movements stalled for the exhibition. Like the barn swallows, some of the seeds in the lumen prints are ghostly apparitions that suggest their eventual dispersal and absence.

Also echoing the processes of growth and decay, Sarah Ciurysek is interested in the human relationship to the ground.² *Landscape* (2011) is a life-size towering layered photograph of a cross section of earth. It positions the exhibition just below the surface, while the rolls draping on the floor suggest the continuation of the depth beneath. Below ground lays a curious habitat, existing on the boundary between materiality and metaphor. Its depth contains the world’s history and decaying matter, and confronts us with the reality of the cycle of death, decomposition, and renewal. It is difficult to not associate a cross section of soil with burial, and also with science and a desire to uncover traces of the past. On another hand, it carries hints of the underworld or hell, along with the uneasy realization that constant tectonic plate movement implies that our ground is always shifting. Containing these many associations alongside physical remnants of the past forms an uneasy position. As the ground stores both physical and material traces of memory and myth, it challenges the idea that habitat and life only exist on the surface. Confronting this notion of containment, Ciurysek’s piece replaces it with layers: of meaning, and of soil, and of photographic panels.

By tracing the intertwining forces of extinction, growth, and renewal, Kavanagh explores how we fit into the coming together of species. Her installation, sculpture, printmaking, and poetry practice focuses on re-establishing or locating the connection between humans and other species that inhabit the world. Her pieces in *Lateral Symmetry* foreground these encounters. The silk paper shaped into lichen cups in *Untitled No.1* (2014) required the ability of worms to weave the delicate threads that make up the paper. The cocoons in *Untitled No.2* (2014) have been vacated by the worms. Opening the cocoon in this way makes it impossible to unravel it into a single thread of silk; sliced open, they look like gaping mouths. While the majority of species of silk worms are domesticated and cannot reproduce independently of humans, their individual survival depends on breaking up the cocoon and severing the long precious strands of silk. Economic value placed on the long strands requires for the cocoons to be boiled while the worm is still inside, killing it. In countries such as China, Korea, and Vietnam, the boiled worm becomes a local delicacy. While they are not explicitly stated in the

work, these cycles of mutual dependence, consumption, and the relationship between human and animal domains, are at the core of Kavanagh’s practice.

The colony of pods in *Untitled No.7* (2014) and *Untitled No. 8* (2014) reverses the sequence of objects moving from nature into the gallery space. Their ceramic bowl-like shapes and clusters both suggest and are meant for living things. At the end of the exhibition the pots will move into the forest. The work’s dispersion will not, in the strictest sense, become a work of public art. The natural materials used to make the pots will become part of the forest, participating in the natural cycle of growth and decay, instead of taking over natural habitat with human detritus that takes centuries to break apart. The piece’s location will not be made public, and Kavanagh’s hope is for the pots to become overgrown. They are built to be architecture for the creatures of the forest, created for them and not for the human viewers. The colony is not so much a sculpture that will become transformed by nature, but a habitat that for the duration of the exhibition acts as sculpture.

The migration of creatures and species emphasizes the porous boundaries and interwoven paths along which objects move in the world. The transformation of dinner remnants through addition of salt brine in Finnigan’s installations challenges the idea that objects can be complete at all. Finnigan has been working with salt brine since September 2001 when she was drawn to newspaper images of ghostly white ash covering people and objects after the 9/11 attacks at the World Trade Centre.³ These photographs, both horrifying and strangely beautiful, led her to experiment with ways to replicate the white coating. As the project developed, she began to explore the role that hospitality and the fleeting nature of communion plays in the human desire to freeze time. Finnigan hosted two events, a dinner party and a tea, which were attended by artists and writers. After the guests left, Finnigan poured brine over the dishes. She saw the growth of crystals, shaped by humidity, barometric pressure, temperature, and other environmental factors, as a way to mark time.

As the crystals formed, the resulting objects became an archive of the event, like an underwater shipwreck or ruins of Pompeii.⁴ Plates, smoked fish, wine glasses, and coffee cups, were all transformed into sparkling crystal objects through addition of salt. The consequent movement of the objects from the dinner table onto plinths shifts the remains further away from their original function, focusing the viewer’s gaze onto the way individual elements have crystallized. As dishes and food become artifacts, their shapes echo Kavangh’s sculptures, textures in the bird droppings in Peters’ *Layers* video, or the sediment layers in Ciurysek’s depiction of the ground. Such parallels suggest that these elements are part of a ceaseless flow of materials, and that the artists participate in it alongside their nonhuman collaborators.

Engagement with the natural world, as it is performed by Ciurysek, Finnigan, Peters, and Kavanagh, always alters it. By tracing the trajectories of objects, both within and outside the gallery’s walls, the exhibition strives to shift the centre away from the human viewer and the artists to a broader

view. As Tim Ingold discusses in *Environment and Planning*, “the environment, then, comprises not the surroundings of the organism but a zone of entanglement.”⁵ He proposes two visions of the world; one is occupied and furnished with things that already exist, while the other is inhabited and woven from the strands of the things’ continual coming-into-being.⁶ *Lateral Symmetry* aims to embrace the latter, asserting that objects cannot be boxed in (despite what the museum cases might do to them), and that their entanglements and migrations will always prevail.⁷

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Natalia Lebedinskaia,
Curator of Contemporary Art, Art Gallery
of Southwestern Manitoba
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LIST OF WORKS
SARAH CIURYSEK
Landscape, Toner photographs printed on Tyvek
9' x 8', separated in 3 panels, 2011

ELVIRA FINNIGAN
Feast and Aftermath: Fish in Bowl, Porcelain bowl, smoked Winnipeg gold-eye, salt crystals, 2013
Feast and Aftermath: Assorted Cheeses on a Platter, Platter, assorted cheeses, grapes, salt crystals, 2013
Feast and Aftermath: Red and White Wine Glasses, Wine glasses, salt crystals, 2013
Feast and Aftermath: Dinner Plate 1 (Louise's Plate), Dinner plate, dinner remains, salt crystals, 2013
Feast and Aftermath: Dinner Plate 2 (Charles' Plate), Dinner plate, dinner remains, salt crystals, 2013
Coffee Cup, Coffee cup, saucer, coffee remains, salt crystals, 2013
Feast and Aftermath: Dinner Plate 3, Dinner plate, dinner remains, salt crystals, 2013
Tea Party's Over! – Tea Pot, Silver plated tea pot, tea leaves, salt crystals, 2011
Tea Party's Over! – Stephanie's Tea Cup, Tea cup, salt crystals, 2011

BASMA KAVANAGH
Untitled No. 1, Silk paper, thread, PVA, 2014, 22" x 12" x 3"
Untitled No. 2, Paper, fabric, mat board, plastic, cotton batting, silk cocoons, on board, 2014, 10" x 10" x 5"
Untitled No. 3, Silk and cotton fabrics, silk and cotton threads, PVA, on board, 2014, 10" x 10"
Untitled No. 6, Silk paper, thread, PVA, 2014, dimensions variable
Untitled No. 7, Ceramic, metal, found wood, 2014, dimensions variable
Untitled No. 8, Ceramic, 2014, dimensions variable

TRACY PETERS
Lumen Series (SHED Project), 30 Lumen images printed on glass panes (30 pieces), 2012/2014, 8"x10" each.
Unusual Migration (SHED Project), Three-dimensional photo-collage (inkjet on vellum paper), 2012, dimensions variable.
Foxtail Barley Seeds, dimensions variable.
Layers (SHED Project), Video (00:55), 2012



¹ Tracy Peters, *SHED Project: artist statement*, 2012, unpublished.

² Sarah Ciurysek, *Biography*, [http://www.sarahciurysek.com/info/biography/].

³ Robert Enright, "Salt Seller: Elvira Finnigan," in *Bordercrossings*, issue 125, March 2013, p.2

⁴ Enright, p.2.

⁵ Tim Ingold, "Bindings against boundaries: entanglements of life in an open world," in *Environment and Planning A*, 2008, volume 40, page 1796.

⁶ Ingold, 1797.

⁷ Ingold, 1809.