

LINES IN THE SNOW is an exhibition of recent drawings by fourteen Canadian artists. They share a common vision fueled by their abilities to expand mark-making in style and substance into artmaking's present moment with its influences and sources becoming increasingly cross-cultural. This process of expansion becomes structural support within which to revisit the perceived immediacy of recognition of current and shifting values and beliefs embedded in contemporary drawing. My intention is to briefly introduce the exhibition and artists by speculating on the present socio-political and aesthetic forces that form a backdrop to their perceived sensibilities.

Conceptions of the "end of ideology," and most versions of technocratic theory express the view that in contemporary Canadian society the deep-rooted social conflicts of the past have been left behind in favour of a general "consensus of ends." More specifically, of course, it is held that class struggles that punctuated 19th and 20th century North American history, and that Marx made the centrepiece of his theoretical scheme and of his practical project for the revolutionary reorganization of capitalism, have today become dissolved, despite the current strident calls for equity, decolonization and reconciliation in Canada. To formulate a critical theory of contemporary society may assume "the end of ideology" in a period calling for the return to much-vaunted globalization, if only the "supply chains" derailed by Covid-19 could be rebooted.

In the face of this tendency to suggest the disappearance of the fundamental conflicts that have set individuals and groups against one another, artists in this exhibition are enmeshed in the ubiquity of conflict and imminent violence associated with rights to land, civil rights, queerness, migration, historical revisioning, the body, representing sexuality and so forth. Conflict is the irremediable fact of the human condition. It is the inescapable source of much of what is creative, as well as destructive in human societies. However, it is the nature of the representation of present-day conflicts that has changed significantly. Today it seems as if the ubiquitous conflict and violence in western culture is only startling when juxtaposed with its virtual absence.

Perhaps violence is but a veiled backdrop for the artists in Lines in the Snow. Each shares the problem of perception of forms to produce radical departures. Their drawings convey information, retinal and abstract readings from one place or plane to another. Nathan Eugene Carson's propositions are overlaid and relationally extend the artist's intention to incorporate a particular blend of illusion and maximalism in drawing without renouncing one for the other. There is an evident thread of romanticism on a rampage. Other drawings in this show can alternately represent a refusal of appearances, as in Ted Barker's deadpan 'self-portraits with detritus'; the collapse, animated implosion and reorganizing of architectural space in Tristram Lansdowne's depictions of surreal modernist spaces; and Audie Murray's exploration of used fabrics not only establishes a bridge between past and present material culture but shares a new spiritual alliance with other makers (e.g., Hilma af Klint), aligned with her process-oriented mark-making to capture and reimagine the residue of Indigenous smudging ceremonies. Olya Mishchenko takes a different tact in rendering detailed quotidian experiences and "spatial inventions" as unexpected architectural configurations, her drawings typically animated and overrun with miniature, animated humanoid figures. The atmospheric conditions enveloping her design-and-build constructions remain undetermined. This curious sense of refusal of meaning and place is also witnessed in a reconfiguring and marking of a support surface for thought in Andreeanne Godin's elegant ephemeral work. There is an equally strident sense of refusal evident in the work of Zachari Logan, here as curator, in his depictions of often biologically incorrect forms of hybrid botanical dreamscapes and morphing figuration. Each artist in turn prioritizes the mysterious and enigmatic.

Wanda Koop questions traditional forms of place and identification by combining rendering of landscape and portraiture applied to haunting white masks whose form may suggest ancient origins. Each of her white masks acts as a support surface for surreal and seemingly distant traces of a floating landscape. Koop's drawings, from the series *View from Here* are propositions to challenge the viewer with "existential questions about who we are, how we are socially constructed, and what we understand about our relationship with the natural world." The masks and their elevated perspectival on whimsical landscapes are related in spirit to Jutai Toonoo's *Aaqaaraluuk*, a sensuous drawing of a human torso in coloured pencil. There is a remedy in Toonoo's unique process of making. One feels an opportunity to invite the viewer inside the space of making that Toonoo "dwells" in and have them "make" their own relational stories, in effect to imagine co-authorship. It is a lateral form of authorship to engage the viewer so there is no one singular directing voice any longer. The drawing is deserving of further exploration of its sense of open space. Could such space be interpreted as mental "black out" spaces, presented to intentionally or unconsciously block out certain narratives? Is the depicted open/empty space a "safe space" for queer or other narratives specific to Inuit culture, a coded space for forgetting as a way of remembering?

One feels as if violence is something comprehended and discreetly negotiated by other artists in *Lines in the Snow*. The implied violence in Stephen Andrews's drawings play off the vulnerability and transcendent qualities of his often shrouded and ghostly human figures culled from online media sources and collaged into fragmented 'scenes.' Figures appear to linger as survivors or witnesses to extreme social conflict, what Andrews identifies as "an endlessly reflected space where what is real and what is not are difficult to tell apart. A veritable house of mirrors." His graphic vision is of some incomprehensible account of violence in the parks, and streets and fenced off areas for public demonstrations and among the archetypal City's modernist spaces. It also evokes the continuous presence of misbehaviour, obstruction, obscenity and the occasional violence of bands of provocateurs amid crowds of dissenters who may frequently express their own unrestrained and indiscriminate violence in thought and word, if not deed. The ephemeral traces of fragmented human forms of Andrew Moncrief are gratuitous vapours, ferocious, malicious and mindless. His drawings may appear to be whimsical but they also offer glimpses of everyday spectacles of public engagement punctuated by curvilinear lines to elicit a dreamy, permanent haze.

As a reminder of its omnipresence, what can be said of violence in Western culture as a whole? Violence and its threat to social order are implicit in the tenuous nature of social bonds in Western culture. We are known for our violence, we of the Americas, the creative violence with which we haul down the good for what we fancy as better; the cruel violence with which Indigenous people have been treated. Ruth Cuthand reflects on genocidal violence against Indigenous people in a series of glass-beaded surfaces that replicate deadly bacterium delivered over the centuries by settler cultures. Her replication of one such bacterium, the gonococcus bacterium is a radiant drawing. There is no convincing mode of interpretation of gonorrhoea, except to note it is sexual and lethal for women. The artist seeks to make drawing become a vehicle to expand the comprehension of both subject and the realm of drawing itself. To this end, Cuthand's materials and surface qualities are not loud and aggressive in any way. Nevertheless, they remain outwardly transformational as they demand and receive engagement with viewers, relying on your body movement to elicit a nearly imperceptible play of light.

The complex black, white and grey marks of Alison Norlen's drawing entitled SPINDRIFT depicts a massive warship under construction in the 1940s. Details in the drawing would suggest the visionary building project is a work in progress, frozen and devoid of workers. The potential strength of the massive structure is obscured and deflated via Norlen's blurring of details, a deliberate obfuscation of the warship's symbolic enforcer status. But no hands are on deck. The steel workers and navy personnel are absent. The drawing comes to double as a sharply focused psychological self-portrait of a 20th-century nation's obsession with growth, outputs, competitive edge. The portrait of a warship construction site has romantic associations with national security, empires and ruling the seas, and yet Norlen's carefully worked surface demands we reflect on the familiar overtones of abandonment that will afflict any maturing empire on the verge of collapse.

And what do we make of Mia Sandhu's erotic portraits of anonymous women? The women in her Bawdy Series are collaged from commercial East Indian erotica of the 1970s that filter into the south Asian diaspora as a relic cultural commodity following Sandhu's family in migration to Canada. The assemblage of isolated feminine figures are notable for faces and crotches obscured by Sandhu's precarious fuzz balls, aggregations of fine graphite lines. Sandhu's drawings overflow with dissent while proposing a benign sense of the purposeful. Her ability to render order, interiority and nodules of abstraction is the undeniable triumph of her drawing practices.

Andreanne Godin's fleeting leaf-like stains on a curvilinear plane of paper announces a mechanics of impermanence and resistance to figurative representation with a quiet nonchalance. There is an allusion to primary forms when rendered on an unusual sculptural surface. Her intimately scaled forms are created in specific proportions and spatial positioning to play on our expectations and frustrations.

Jane Buyers proposes a different tact by drawing dazzling illusions of elegant plant matter on pages taken from science textbooks and journals. Her depiction of specimen foliage nearly obscures the found text on her chosen support surface, narrowing and challenging the discernible gap between the two. Within this recognizable gap is a dynamic that is formally non-specific without being wholly abstract. One is left to contemplate a relationship between the dense pattern of plant matter as if it were refracted, gaining in luminescence as the drawing paradoxically blocks and synthesizes information/text on the printed page. In a flush of succeeding illusions, the visual information exceeds its implied materiality and floats off the support surface.

What lingers long after one comprehends the familiar, the mysterious and the enigmatic in the dynamic drawings of each artist is the inexplicable visual and emotional impact. Each drawing filled with a tension of immediacy. Each secure in the knowledge that too literal an interpretation of any subject is not only undesirable but, perhaps more important, it kills the picture.

Essay by celebrated Canadian curator and critic, Wayne Baerwaldt.