

FALL/WINTER 2017-18

FREE

ARTICULATE

The first word on arts, culture and heritage in the Columbia Basin

KAREN THATCHER: QUILTMaking AS THERAPY
VENICE BIENNALE: OUR MAN IN ITALY
SHAMBHALA: 20 YEARS AND COUNTING

BRUCE PATERSON'S WILD WORLDS
SHARON STEARNS' WISHBONE THEATRE
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HEAT, HOLIDAYS AND HEAVENLY ART



I've always loved the sunny days of summer but what a crazy scary summer it's been. Where I live in the south end of the Slocan Valley we've been so far spared the wildfire hazard, except for some seriously smoky days when the haze has made eyes itch and breathing difficult. Being close to creeks, rivers and lakes here gives us some respite

from the elements. Others aren't so lucky, as we well know. The hot dry days have been relentless: good for ripening tomatoes; not so good for other living things. I'm sure we're all looking forward to the time when the weather breaks and the rains come.

I got away for a couple of weeks to Cape Breton Island in August, my second trip to that part of the Maritimes. The temperatures were at least 10 degrees cooler than at home but that didn't stop me from swimming in the north Atlantic and hiking in the highlands. I even got to tour the *Bluenose II*, which was moored one weekend in Sydney harbour. And, of course, there were lots of opportunities to visit galleries, prowl museums and listen to Celtic music at neighbourhood ceilidhs and in pubs. At the Celtic Music Interpretive Centre in Judique I even attempted to play the fiddle, with very little success. I'd go back again in a blink.

In the Columbia Basin we're no slouches in the culture department either, as the array of artists in this issue of *ARTiculate* confirms. Here's just a sampling:

- Our cover artist, Rossland quilter Karen Thatcher, experienced a traumatic brain injury 20 years ago and came to her art as part of her recovery process. Two of my woman friends are also in recovery from concussions they suffered in accidents. It's fair to say that their lives, and Karen's, will never be the same again. Grappling with limitations is frustrating, frightening and depressing but can ultimately be an opportunity for growth and individual expression.
- Appledale metal artist Rabi'a is a bundle of creative energy. I visited her acreage during the Eat-the-Garden tour in the Slocan Valley in July and was gobsmacked by the quirky beauty of her sculptures, many of which are displayed outside around her property. We are pleased to be able to share her work with you.
- Bruce Paterson is also an artistic force to be reckoned with. His erotic and sometimes shocking ceramic creatures shake up our perceptions and charm with their colour and otherworldliness. Bruce is also a cartoonist and painter and his Creston home is filled to the brim with his artwork.

Finally, when Nelson sculptor Ian Johnston asked if we could provide him with press credentials to attend the Venice Biennale, we jumped at the chance. His first-hand observations on one example of Canadian content at the Biennale make for intriguing reading.

Closer to home, we are thrilled to be able to celebrate milestones, book releases, small towns and all manner of things artistic and historical. Happy reading!

Margaret Tessman, editor

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Karen Thatcher's quilt, *B.C. Skiing*, was the second-place winner in the Canadian Quilters' Association's 2013 Winter Wonderland members' challenge. Photo courtesy Karen Thatcher

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VENICE BIENNALE 2017



Sebastián Díaz Morales, *Suspension*. Video installation, 14 minutes 30 seconds.
Photo: Arnas Anskaitis

Geoffrey Farmer's *A way out of the mirror*

By Ian Johnston

In May I visited Venice and the preview of the 57th International Art Exhibition—*La Biennale di Venezia*. The Biennale is considered one of the world's premier art events, hosting exhibitions from over 87 nations on two sites and across the city of Venice: in public squares, exhibition halls, churches, department stores and other alternative venues. Within the two main sites, the Giardini and the Arsenale, two more exhibitions under the title “Viva Arte Viva” feature the work of another 120 artists. Curator Christine Macel writes in a press release, “Today, in a world full of conflict and shocks, art bears witness to the most precious part of what makes us human . . . Viva Arte Viva is an exclamation, a passionate outcry for art and the state of the artist.”

While I agree with Macel's statement, I think that the individual national pavilions responded to her theme better than the collection of work on display in the two exhibitions. The breadth and diversity of the shows was a bit like icing on a cake almost too rich for consumption. My perception may have been tilted by the overwhelming quantity and quality of work that I saw even before entering the epic and labyrinthine curated shows. All of this in the span of two eight-hour days of trekking with hoards of art press from pavilion to pavilion, catching the odd speech or performance if the timing worked out.

After working my way through the first of these two exhibitions, I came into a dimly lit and cavernous room with a scaffolding structure on one side for seating and leaning against, and a

7.6-metre video screen on the other side. The Sebastián Díaz Morales piece called *Suspension* was a 14-minute looped video, featuring a larger-than-life person falling/floating lazily in space, a landscape of clouds and smoke fading in and out and an eerie soundtrack playing at an equally mesmerizing pace. I got stuck in this room for at least two cycles of the loop and remember fondly the peace and tranquility of the work best described by Morales: “As in a dream state, through that suspended fall the man's mind is a container holding past, present and future in a single consciousness. It is in this construction, as in a dream, in his mind, where man envisions and shapes the world” (sebastiandiazmorales.com). Perhaps it also resonated with my own long-standing desire to defy gravity. “Perhaps falling isn't a dream at all—perhaps falling is what's real.”

As if drawn to a mirror, my attention and curiosity was also captured by Geoffrey Farmer's *A way out of the mirror* in the Canadian Pavilion, curated by Kitty Scott. Farmer's piece, named after an Allen Ginsberg poem, presents a cryptic collection of ephemeral, personal ideas and narrative fragments in a multitude of incongruous objects strategically placed in and around the remains of the pavilion in the Giardini. At first blush, this work seems to evade answers to the “Why this? Why now?” questions that need to be asked of a work that represents Canada on the international art stage. The roof has been peeled off the building and the glass that once defined the bounds of the space has vanished. Often criticized as a difficult building within which to show work, Farmer has done to the building what countless curators and artists before him would have loved to do: deconstruct and remodel it to a more functional form.

Water unifies the work and serves as a thread to pull us down Farmer's rabbit hole, should we feel so compelled. The work literally pulses with water that erupts sometimes forcefully from a geyser at its centre. Fine jets, almost unnoticed, spray the viewer, who is left wondering from where they emanate. This is a perfect metaphor for the complacency that one can easily settle into in the idyllic context of business-as-usual Canada. Perfect, until the persistence of its colonial roots and systemic oppression of its Indigenous peoples pokes and prods the status quo and begs a deeper, more honest examination of history than has typically been taught.

The tangled web of the artist's personal history combines with the history of Venice and the creation of the Canadian Pavilion in 1957, present in the form of a text from Allen Ginsberg and a bronze likeness of a praying mantis, among other pieces. Also present is a bludgeoned grandfather clock that randomly ejaculates water, no doubt stemming from ideas articulated in the artist's statement mounted on the exterior wall of the pavilion.

At first this collection of anecdotal ideas served to obfuscate the larger message of the work, which resonated most strongly with me as an artist and Canadian. The prevailing presence in the work is a series of 71 scattered bronze two-by-fours that are piled around the centre fountain/geyser and lean against the outer walls. The finely crafted objects, printed with wood grain using a lithographic process, refer to recently discovered images of a lumber-truck accident that killed the artist's grandfather. The incident stemmed from a time before Farmer's birth and was shrouded in secrecy until just recently. As is often the case with family and national history, one lets go of or simply buries past pain as a means to move forward. Yet the residual effect, or what society now defines as intergenerational trauma, only slumbers to awaken and reassert itself.

Like the lumber-truck accident, the parallel, traumatic effect of Canada's colonization on Indigenous peoples is a force that we are slowly coming to understand and reckon with. Farmer's *A way out of the mirror* uses the rediscovered memories of his personal family history as an allegory of the legacy of a nation grappling with the meaning of reconciliation, or, as Métis artist David Garneau terms it, conciliation.



Geoffrey Farmer, *A way out of the mirror*, 2017. Installation view at the Canada Pavilion for the 57th International Art Exhibition—*La Biennale di Venezia*. Photo: Francesco Barasciutti

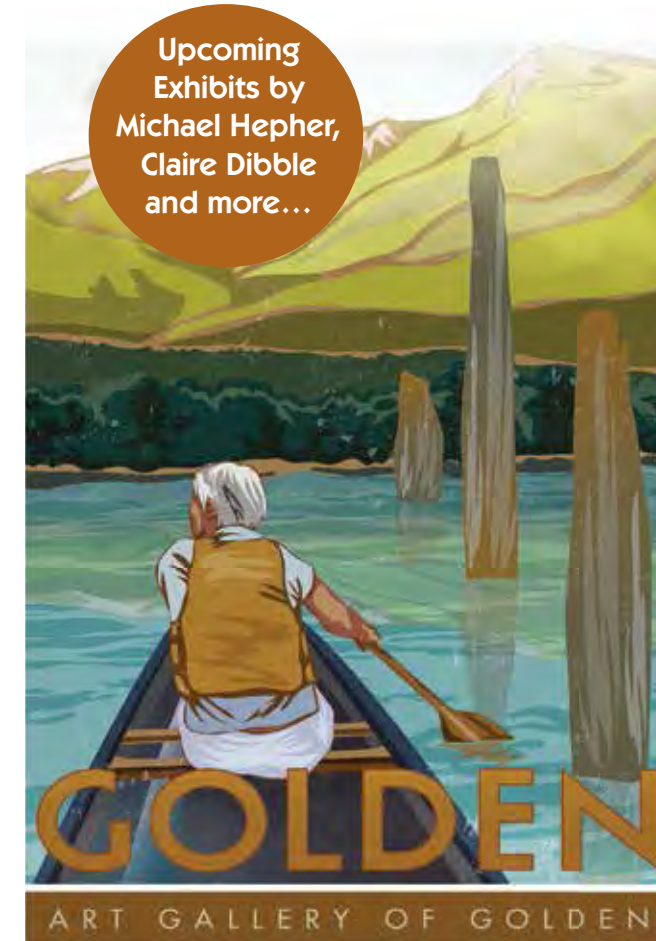
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