

Emily Jan *After the Hunt*
Anne Billy *Fleeting Memory*

Union Gallery
Sept 16 - Nov 11, 2016



FOREWORD

The Union Gallery is pleased to publish this catalogue documenting the exhibitions *After the Hunt* by Emily Jan in the main gallery and *Fleeting Memory* by Anne Billy in the project room. Jan's visually stunning installation, a twenty-foot long 3-dimensional tableau inspired by 17th century Dutch still life, is as compelling as it is disquieting. Billy's work on the other hand is more intimate; personal explorations of lived experiences and the memories connected with them. The gallery is delighted to be able to bring such accomplished artists to Kingston.

As always the production of any exhibition would not happen without the help of many people. First and foremost I would like to thank the artists for the wonderful work in these two exhibitions. As well, their generosity and commitment over the course of the exhibitions' development made for a truly pleasurable experience from start to finish.

We are also fortunate to have two talented PHD students who contributed texts for these exhibitions. I extend my thanks to Ellyn Walker who provides a thoughtful reading of Jan's work through the lens of the Still Life genre in relation to colonial histories both in the broader context and more specifically to Kingston, as the former capital of the nation. I also want to thank Teresa Carlesimo who designed the catalogue and provided the insightful text for Anne Billy's show. I must also acknowledge the hard work of gallery staff member Ashley Newton and all the volunteers who helped with various aspects of the exhibition.

Through the generosity of the George Taylor Richardson Memorial Fund at Queen's University the gallery was able to support Emily Jan's exhibition and catalogue. Over the years, this fund has made many of the gallery shows by professional artists possible. We greatly appreciate the ongoing support we receive from Queen's University, the Alma Mater Society, the Society of Graduate and Professional Students, the Cultural Studies Program at Queen's, the Kingston Arts Council and the City of Kingston Arts Fund.

Jocelyn Purdie
Director, Union Gallery

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EMILY
JAN



STILL LIFES, ONGOING RELATIONS

Ellyn Walker

The land where Kingston, Ontario is now situated, has a rich cultural history that begins as far back as the last ice age, as archaeological discoveries across the city have evidenced indigenous occupation since the Holocene.¹ Early indigenous peoples lived along the west end and central north shore of Lake Ontario, ancestors of the Neutral, Huron, and Petun,² and later the Seneca and Cayuga of the Five Nations Iroquois who used the north shore “for hunting, fishing, and participation in the European fur trade.”³ The area’s abundant resources included wild game, fish and fleshy fruits – all of which were important staples of indigenous diet and thus subsistence systems. However, by 1783, the Mississaugas “had ceded Kingston and the surrounding territory to the British crown”⁴ through a process of questionable treaty negotiations that resulted in settler occupation ranging from military, governmental, rural, educational, as well as carceral enterprises that still continue to this day.

The Still Life genre within art history directly supports these kinds of colonial histories, constructing an imaginary world in which settler wealth and affluence come at the stake of indigenous land and its resources. Still Life images depict consumable objects (foodstuffs) as evidence of colonial capital, rather than as the precious gifts from Mother Earth that indigenous cultures around the world believe them to be. This strategic re-orientation of cultural histories makes the Still Life genre a critical site to unsettle, as it shows “a world in which humans have deeply intervened by moving, crafting and sometimes destroying objects,”⁵ such as natural and non-renewable resources. As such, artist Emily Jan deploys the Still Life genre in a different way within her exhibition, making *material* the ways in which colonial objecthood is dependent upon environmental exploitation and indigenous dispossession.

Historically used to depict objects of material and visual culture “that have been

1 “Technical Report: Master Plan of Archeological Resources for the City of Kingston,” 34.

2 Ibid 20.

3 Ibid 24.

4 Ibid 28.

5 Clintberg 10.

created, traded, transferred and reused by many actors and agents” across time and space, the Still Life genre is thus “deeply important because of how [it] reveal[s] social systems as connected to economies.”⁶ Art historian Mark Clintberg elaborates on the genre’s continued currency, explaining that it offers a visual record of commodities in colonial times, and now, within contemporary capitalist culture.⁷ These politics (of coloniality and capitalism) are lived experiences within Kingston and its surrounding area(s), as the city continues to benefit from its location on indigenous land, the prison industrial complex, and most recently, the corporatization of education. While Kingston was at one time the centre of the nation, its failure as such suggests a kind of historicity that is akin to the long-established genre of Still Life upon which Jan’s work draws. Comprised of a large-scale installation entitled *After the Hunt* (2013), Jan’s exhibition allows nuanced comparisons to be drawn between the work’s art historical influences and its current site of presentation in the country’s former capital. While her contemporary re-enactment of the historical Still Life demonstrates the genre’s continued influence over time, it also points to its significance within historical contexts, such as would be seen in ancient Egypt, Roman Times, the High Court, or more recently, in the Museum.

Presented by Union Gallery, which is located on the campus of Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, Jan’s exhibition importantly intervenes into an intrinsically colonial space - one in which 170 years of national identity and education are heavily invested. Founded in 1841, twenty-six years before officially becoming ‘Canada,’ Queen’s University was introduced to the world via a royal charter issued by Queen Victoria herself. Notably, the school’s official university gallery - the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, which was founded in 1957 - boasts an expansive collection of Still Life paintings from the Dutch Golden Age, Baroque-era, as well as other prominent European and Canadian holdings. Instead, Jan’s dioramic Still Life on view at Union Gallery offers a unique counter-piece to the ways in which institutions can *show* as well as *subvert* the genre’s legacy.

Based on a painting by Flemish artist Frans Snijders called *Game Still Life with a Roe Deer* (1630), in Jan’s re-created version, she turns the Still Life image into a dioramic installation in which a long dinner table in the middle of the gallery is lavishly dressed for viewers to physically walk around. Snijders’ original image depicts a bountiful scene in which a hunted deer is suspended above an opulent dinner table that features wild game, flora and other edible provisions. Like Snijders’ painting, Jan’s table contains a variety of leftover fruit, seafood, liquor, plants, flowers,

6 Ibid 11.

7 Ibid.

candlesticks, hunted bird and game, and the carcass of a roe deer that hangs from the ceiling and that remains the focal point of the work.

Unique to Jan's version, however, is the physicality of the Still Life that allows for a particular kind of readability. Upon closer inspection that comes from actually moving around the work, the materials used to create *After the Hunt's* gluttonous scene begin to reveal themselves. The soft and ostensibly life-like animals are made out of wool, felt, reed and leather, while the other entities - fruits, fish and plants - are made out of plastic, resin and silicone. Rather than viewing these as inanimate objects within a Still Life painting that evidence a colonial and capitalist worldview, Jan's life-size re-presentation of them raises the question of relationality, including how one acquires, moves, keeps, cares for, uses and/or consumes living and non-living things.



Emily Jan
After the Hunt
mixed media
installation dimensions: 20' x 4' x 8'
2014

The diorama as a genre in-and-of-itself has historical roots in the colonial project – functioning as a kind of natural history exhibit within the museum to establish anthropological understandings of settler ‘progress’ and indigenous ‘traditionalism.’ Instead, Jan's redeployment of it within a contemporary art gallery proposes a different kind of purpose: one in which the fantasy (and thus failure) of the colonial project – like Kingston as the former centre of political power - becomes visible. This is particularly achieved through the artwork's three-dimensionality, as one physically

navigates around the installation and is thus forced to confront its (un)reality. It is then that the constructed nature and strange materiality of the objects and species alert viewers to pay attention to the (de)colonial lens through which one sees – a sentiment similarly evoked in the very etymology of the word ‘diorama,’ which means, “through that which is seen.” It can thus be argued that Snijder’s historical Still Life painting *Game Still Life with a Roe Deer* is a propagandist and colonial device – depictive of the rise of Antwerpian wealth prior to its fall, that would soon come with Spanish occupation.



Emily Jan
After the Hunt
mixed media
installation dimensions: 20' x 4' x 8'
2014

While not featured within the exhibition, Jan’s other dioramic installation, *Before the Fall* (2015), features a full-size quagga made of reed, wool, resin and human hair, alongside a swarm of hundreds of monarch butterflies on the surrounding walls made from silk and linen. The monarchs’ annual migration from California to Mexico reflects Jan’s own experience of living between the two places; as well as the species’ current provincial designation as a ‘Species of Special Concern’ in Ontario. Similarly, Jan’s time living in Cape Town more than a decade ago influenced the focal subject of the installation, where she learned of the quagga - a sub-species of zebra native to South Africa with stripes on its upper-frontal region only. Because of their rareness, the quagga have long represented a trophy of colonial interest, conquest and power. Hunted into extinction by the late-1800’s, the quagga later experienced a period of ‘breeding back’ in 1987, onwards.



Emily Jan
Before the Fall
wood, reed, resin, human and synthetic hair, linen, silk and chandelier
installation dimensions: 12' x 12' x 12'
2015

Like with *After the Hunt*, *Before the Fall* is also based on an art historical work – a watercolour entitled *Quagga, an extinct equid* (1793) that portrays one of King Louis XVI's menagerie specimens at Versailles. Painted by French artist Nicolas Marechal, the image shows a quagga with intensified colours so as to underscore the animal's magnificence and curiosity, in particular, within the King's rare collection. Jan's re-created quagga mirrors Marechal's aggrandized version, which, in doing so, gestures towards colonialism's capacity to construct (and ultimately exploit) one's understandings of nature. Jan's critique of coloniality also evidences a particular matrix of cultural and environmental loss, wherein her installation, the quagga and monarchs' stoic and unaffected positions are indicative of their species' endangerment and/or extinction. While indigenous worldviews uphold the belief that one must never take more than is needed, indeed, it is settlers that have the most to learn from this sentiment. Settlers would also do well to listen more closely to the original inhabitants and care-takers of this land so as to prevent the further decline of species and environmental extinction, which are part of "all our relations".

Combined, Jan's works explore colonial practices and critique their histories, underscoring the waste and detriment that come with both occupation and



Emily Jan
Before the Fall
wood, reed, resin, human and synthetic hair, linen, silk and chandelier
installation dimensions: 12' x 12' x 12'
2015



Emily Jan
Before the Fall
wood, reed, resin, human and synthetic hair, linen, silk and chandelier
installation dimensions: 12' x 12' x 12'
2015

exploitation in their varied forms. The exhibition subverts the Still Life genre by making it larger-than-life; in its re-presentation, one can clearly see the ‘remains’ of the colonial project. *After the Hunt* signals the need to reconsider our responsibilities as guests on a land that is shared by many living things. As such, Jan’s artworks unsettle narratives of place, belonging and art histories – all of which hold particular relevance in a place like Kingston, where the very land on which the gallery stands can, in fact, be claimed by many people, nations and things.

“Technical Report: Master Plan of Archeological Resources for the City of Kingston,” Archaeological Services Inc., Kingston, March 2010: 1-174. Web. https://www.cityofkingston.ca/documents/10180/14295/MasterPlan_Archaological_Technical.pdf/8512e700-9352-474a-b7fa-6a97f4004ebc

Mark Clintberg, “Still Alive: Celia Perrin Sidarous, Peter Morin and the Still Life Genre,” C Magazine, Vol. 125, Spring 2015: 10-14. Web. <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.queensu.ca/docview/1672176119/fulltextPDF/738B703D77A149EFPQ/1?accountid=6180>



Emily Jan
After the Hunt
mixed media
installation dimensions: 20' x 4' x 8'
2014

BIOGRAPHIES

Emily Jan is a Montréal-based artist and writer. Originally hailing from San Francisco, California, Jan has traveled to 34 countries and lived in four, including South Africa and Mexico. As a wanderer, naturalist, and collector of objects and experiences, she is guided in her work by the spirit of exploration, kinship, and curiosity.

Jan holds an MFA from Concordia University (2014), a BA with Honours from Brown University (2000), and a BFA with High Distinction from the California College of the Arts (2009). Her work has been exhibited and has won awards nationally and internationally, most recently at the Fiberart International Triennial in Pittsburgh, USA. Jan is currently working on two artist's books which will be published in 2017 with Les Éditions Roselin.

Ellyn Walker is a writer and curator interested in questions of cross-cultural representation, collaboration and affinity within the political context of Canada. Her writing has been published by the Journal of Curatorial Studies, PUBLIC, Blackflash Magazine, Fuse Magazine, C Magazine, Surrey Art Gallery, Gallery 44, A Space Gallery, and the Power Plant, amongst others. Her curatorial projects have been presented by the AGO, Prefix ICA, Union Gallery and the Art Gallery of Mississauga. Ellyn lives in Toronto and is currently pursuing a PhD in Cultural Studies at Queen's University.

ANNE BILLY



Anne Billy
Genève
thread, rope, old sheet made of linen on a giant embroidery hoop
220 x 153 x 6 cm
2013

SOME TITLE HERE

AND MAYBE A SUB TITLE HERE

TERESA CARLESIMO

In the *Social Production of Art* Janet Wolff writes that “The forms of artistic production available to the artist play an active part in constructing the work of art.” As we read any work of art, she argues that we must consider the work’s “logic of construction,” as well as any social relations that are made visible.¹ In the exhibition *Fleeting Memory*, Anne Billy considers how materials can be used to reflect on the human condition, how meaning is constructed and communicated through the clothing and textiles that cover and protect us throughout our lives. This social dimension is fundamental in her work, where relationships, family ties and social bonds come to form the content of much of her reflection. Using found fabrics, including old bed sheets and worn shirts, she explores the social significance of these textiles, where memories become woven into the materials. Like architecture, fabrics become a storehouse of memories, where they bear the trace of our past experiences and everyday life through the accumulation of marks and stains, as well as the degradation of the material itself.

While these marks can remind us of our interactions with others, they also bear a personal significance. Billy is interested in this tension between social life and isolation, between memory and loss, where for instance, an item of clothing from someone who is no longer in our life can evoke their presence. Suspended in the gallery, *Dénommé Jean-Marc* (2014) is a series of worn button-front shirts into which she has embroidered and cross stitched hands, homes and other symbols that suggest a past presence or place. Hung at a height that invokes a standing person, the shirts move gently as viewers pass through the space. While the shirts rest on embellished clothes hangers, they appear slightly voluminous, as though a body inhabits them. This tension between presence and absence echoes throughout the exhibition, giving an emotional weight to the works.

The detailed needlework throughout *Fleeting Memory* draws out the significance of the hand, and the experimental work *Couverture* (2012) explores this significance

1 Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1981), 65.



Anne Billy
Dénonmé Jean-Marc IV
shirt, embroidery, hanger,
wood, nylon, stockings
100 x 60 x 15 cm

through both process and representation. Made of several pieces of delicate funeral paper painstakingly stitched together, evoking a quilt, *Couverture* is an assemblage that represents fragile social bonds. The delicacy and fragility of the paper demands a careful and intimate relationship between artist and material, while the handwork communicates the labour intensive nature of the work's construction. Time emerges in this work, present in both the ephemerality of the material and the process of its production.

As the exhibition's title suggests, our memory is fleeting and in flux, resonating through the spaces that we inhabit, which exist in a similar state of impermanence. Through fibre and textile-work, Billy's investigations bring to light this impermanence, exploring the delicate nuances of social life, while reflecting on the impact of isolation.



Anne Billy
Dénommé Jean-Marc III
shirt, embroidery, hanger, wood, nylon, stockings
100 x 60 x 15 cm
2014



BIOGRAPHIES

Anne Billy received her BFA with distinction in Studio Art from Concordia University. She has received grants from the Quebec Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the Fonds FCAC (Quebec), and has shown in exhibitions in North America and Europe. Her works are also included in numerous collections, including the Canada Council Art Bank, the loan collection at the Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec, the Lavalin Collection of the Musée d'art Contemporain de Montréal, the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery and in private collections.

Teresa Carlesimo is an interdisciplinary artist currently pursuing a PhD in Cultural Studies at Queen's University. She has recently exhibited at Museum London, Bellevue Arts Museum in Washington, Eyelevel in Halifax, and Art Mür in Montréal. In fall 2016 she was an artist in residence at the National University of Ireland where her work addressed the visual culture of urbanization. Recent and forthcoming publications include *Performance Research*, *Public Journal*, and *Art Papers*. Her work has been exhibited throughout Canada and the US.

(Facing page) Anne Billy
Couverture
thread and ink on Chinese funeral paper
156 x 71 cm
2012