

Ideas & Things

Jen Aitken
Kelly Lycan
Hadley+Maxwell
Mark Neufeld
Derek Sullivan

Kamloops Art Gallery
March 28 to June 13, 2015

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March 28 to June 13, 2015 and curated by Charo Neville

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kamloops **ART GALLERY**





Top: Mark Neufield, *May 8, 1906: A Film Adrift in the Cosmos*, 2015 (detail)
Bottom: Kelly Lycan, *More Than Anything*, 2014–2015 (detail)

"The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. And, yet, the word things holds within it a more audacious ambiguity."

"Temporalized as the before and after of the object, thingness amounts to a latency (the not yet formed or the not yet formable) and to an excess (what remains physically or metaphysically irreducible to objects). But this temporality obscures the all-at-onceness, the simultaneity, of the object/thing dialectic and the fact that, all at once, the thing seems to name the object, just as it is, even as it names something else."

Ed. Bill Brown, "Thing Theory" in *Things*, 2004 (4,5).

The social life of things, the representation of things and the potency of objects have been at the crux of visual culture since the turn of the 20th Century and remain central to contemporary theoretical debates. The disruption to the definition of art by French-American artist Marcel Duchamp is still being interrogated in different ways by artists today.

The art object is no longer understood to be autonomous from the surrounding world, but instead, is seen as part of and sourced from the world around us. Branches of critical theory such as Thing Theory focus on human-object interactions and call into question the ways in which we make meaning out of things, depending on the context and use. While assimilating and expanding on post-object theories and conceptual strategies, artistic production centred on object culture and materiality has persevered.

Ideas & Things looks at current material (thing) and conceptually (idea) based artistic practices that are engaged in this ethos, where objects are no longer privileged but integrated into a greater exploration of space, time, material and subject. The exhibition brings together the work of five Canadian artists whose practices share a strong research methodology and diverse approach to materiality through the investigation of colour theory, text, intervention into the conventions of gallery display and viewership, integration of the everyday object, cinematic history and performance. New work has been created for *Ideas & Things* and includes installations made specifically for this exhibition space.

While acknowledging art history of the past through a continued dialogue with modernist sculpture, abstraction and conceptualism, the work of Jen Aitken, Kelly Lycan, Hadley + Maxwell, Mark Neufeld and Derek Sullivan forges speculative situations and propositions. Traditional display methods such as the vitrine and plinth are no longer relevant; in some cases the pedestal and the wall are the work. In a double agency where form and content merge, the architectural space of the exhibition has become the exhibition. The works question the monument and the monumental and offer a new currency of ideas about things.

Curated by Charo Neville, Curator, Kamloops Art Gallery



Jen Aitken

Components, 2011-2012

vinyl and spandex

Untitled Drawings, 2013

ink on paper

Welopim, 2015

resin and foam

Untitled Drawing 55, 2015

gouache, pencil and liquid paper on wall

Jen Aitken is based in Toronto, Ontario. After studying fashion design at Ryerson University, she completed her BFA at Emily Carr University, Vancouver, in 2010 and her MFA at the University of Guelph, Ontario in 2014.

Aitken dissects, intersects and re-purposes materials to create abstract sculptures that seem familiar but appear anew as unique hybrids of biomorphic, architectural and synthetic forms. Intentionally “too slippery to pin down” Aitken’s work suggests a multitude of references: “furniture, machine parts, organs, cartoons, sea life, minimalist sculpture, textile art.”¹ Influenced by modernist artists such as David Rabinowitch, Donald Judd and Tony Smith, Aitken’s practice is rooted in formalism. She is interested in the colours, textures and composition of the materials themselves as well as the organization of the structure in space, how it relates to the ground on which it sits and how the viewer perceives it from various angles. While highly formal, the work also contains an embodied awareness of its temporal dimension, where space, material and time are conflated to create a bodily experience for the viewer. Aitken states that “each sculpture is both a thing in itself and a material translation of an idea of a form.”²

This installation is comprised of work made over the past four years and new work. Her *Components* reference the modernist architect Le Corbusier’s Modulor, an idiosyncratic system that he devised for his buildings that was later codified into two books based on a harmonious combination of human measurements, the double unit, the Fibonacci numbers, and the golden ratio. The *Components* are made up of parts that follow the modularity of the Fibonacci sequence. The configuration is therefore able to vary from one exhibition to the next; they are meant simultaneously as discrete objects, interdependent sculptures and pedestals for smaller sculptures. These works recall

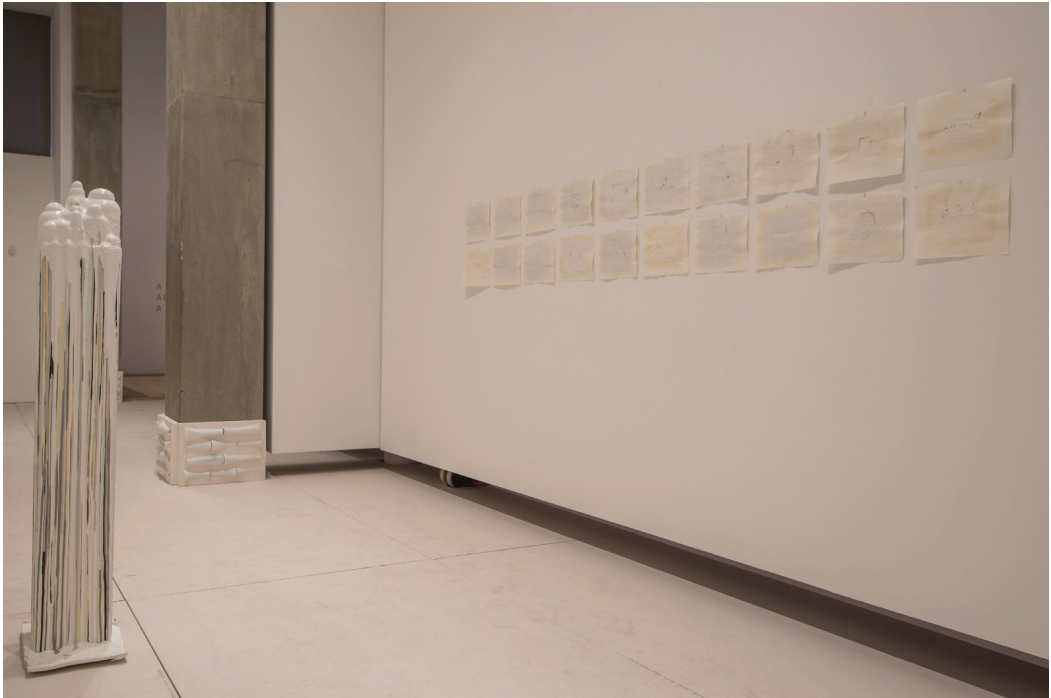
1 Richmond Art Gallery artist statement, January 2013.

2 Jen Aitken, *Poda*, MFA thesis, May 5, 2014.

the sensuality and absurdity of surrealist forms, pop art soft sculptures or baroque textiles. The focus in this body of work is the exterior surface not the interior. Aitken's more recent works made out of concrete and polyurethane evoke Brutalist architecture on an intimate scale; while concrete buildings can be oppressively monumental and imposing, Aitken's sculptures contain a network of individual formal elements that are navigated from a bodily perspective. Here the structure, the material and content fuse.

Aitken's drawings are an activity that supports the sculptures. The shapes of the sculptures can be visually mapped onto the shapes of the drawings and the forms proposed in the drawings can be imagined as three-dimensional objects. Aitken makes drawings directly on the wall of the Gallery to bring the drawings into a closer spatial relationship with the architecture and the sculptures. In this way there is a more active exchange between the two mediums, where they can be understood as a cohesive material gesture.





Kelly Lycan

Mantles, 1998

wood and house paint

Mantles, 1998

works on paper

Beyond Beyond, 2012-2014

wood, house paint and pill bottles

Milk White, 2014

vases and plaster

Rumination 3, detail, 2014

rag, house paint and glue

More Than Anything, 2014-2015

various materials

Kelly Lycan is a Vancouver based artist. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and her Master of Fine Arts from the University of California, Santa Barbara and Los Angeles.

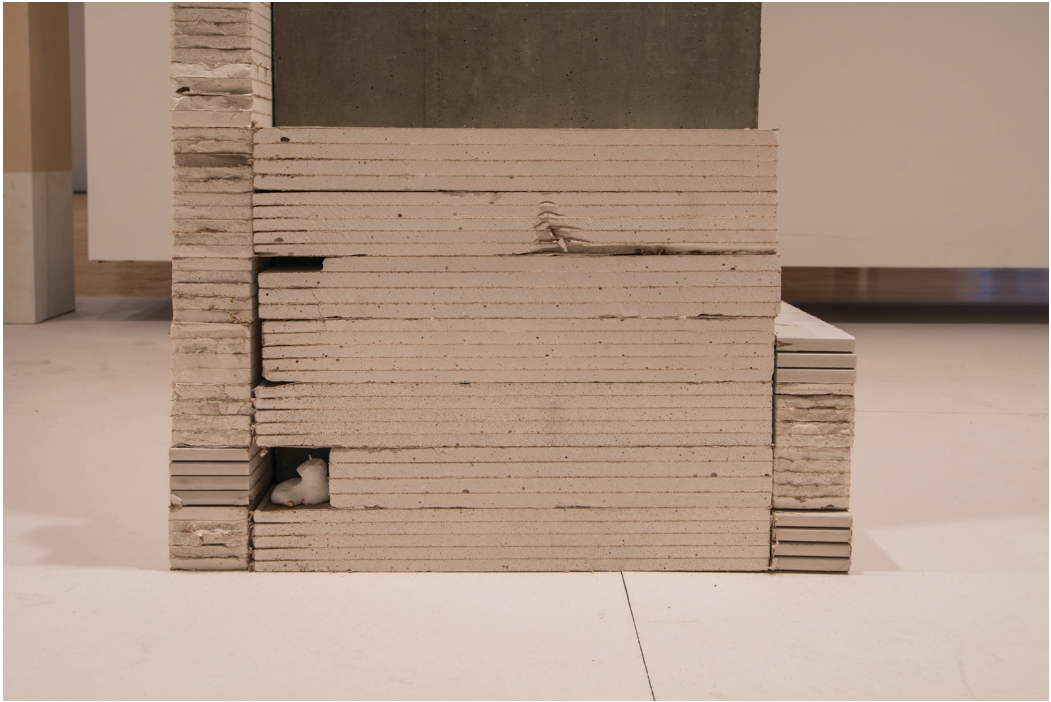
Lycan's photo-based and installation practice examines how the value of objects is contingent upon the conditions of display and how value shifts through the process of exchange, re-purposing and re-contextualization. Her work plays with the translation of objects from the everyday world to the studio and the gallery. Lycan creates composites that reference a wide range of display vernaculars, including collections and methods of display found in museums, institutional gift shops, cheap retail stores, or high-end department stores. For her newest project *More Than Anything* Lycan states that the work is about more than the 'thing,' it is about the presentation of the thing and desire, as the title suggests.

Lycan has created a monochromatic still life that emphasizes the false neutrality of the white cube and subverts the privileged space of the studio. Made specifically for this space, the installation becomes part of the architecture so that the Gallery is no longer a backdrop for display. The typical support for the artwork is the artwork itself and there is a shift in the relationship between the pedestal and the art object. Drywall that is normally made invisible through layers of mud and paint is revealed in its natural state on the floor, on the wall and in stacks. Plinths normally meant to hold a museum

object emerge directly from the floor, mirroring the existing concrete columns and playfully calling attention to the phallogocentric character of architecture and design. In *More Than Anything* shelves cut out of drywall affixed to the wall suggest an empty reference the museological configuration of objects like snuff bottles or ancient figures. The lack of objects on these shelves relies on the viewer to fill in the blanks. The function of take-out containers and knick-knacks, once briefly of service, is re-purposed in the Gallery so that the value of these objects shifts.

The collection of leaning cutout mantle pieces reflect a homogenization of domestic space, each painted in a different shade of Martha Stewart white paint. Each cutout contains unique features traced from objects found on mantles in individual homes. Lycan's stack in the Gallery flattens and conflates the distinctions between home decor, the working space of the studio and the display space of the Gallery.

Operating between painting, photography and sculpture, Lycan's approach to installation obscures time and perception, so that the still life appears in the process of development and the gallery space is transformed into a monochromatic image waiting to be captured. Carefully placed in an organized mess, Lycan's staged environment creates a bodily experience where the set becomes a stage for the viewer as well as the objects. The homogenous palette, punctuated by subtle shades of difference, provides a contemplative space for our subjectivity and for the distinctions between experience and reproduction.





Hadley+Maxwell

Graces and Exemplars, 2013

Cinefoil, magnets, steel

Nymph, 2013

Cinefoil, magnets, steel

Hadley+Maxwell have been collaborating since they met in Vancouver, Canada, in 1997. They live and work in Berlin, Germany and their work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions internationally.

Hadley+Maxwell's installations, performances and writings re-frame iconic imagery and traditional subjects drawn from everyday life, popular culture and artistic and political movements. Their work explores shifts in meaning and significance in relation to aesthetic conventions of the cinema, the montage, the figure, and most recently, the monument. *Grace and Exemplars* and *Nymph* are part of a larger body of work called *Received Ideas*, which, as its title suggested, refers to the multitude of borrowed and associated references and forms that the duo integrate in their work. The title is also drawn from Gustave Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas*, a satirical collection of writing that lampooned bourgeoisie French society, compiled in the 1870s as an appendix to his unfinished novel *Bouvard et Pécuche*. Like Flaubert's project, Hadley+Maxwell's is also unfinished and ongoing like an encyclopedia or dictionary.

This installation displays an inventory or "archive" of body parts and clothing made through impressions in Cinefoil (a material used in theatrical lighting) that are cast from monuments in seven different cities around the world (Berlin, Stuttgart, Toronto, Edmonton, Bergen, Dublin and Sydney). The artists work with actual monuments and public sculptures, recording gestures that are imbued with a significance meant to be read easily by a general public. Charting remnants of Classicism and the beginnings of modernity, Hadley+Maxwell's re-configuration removes parts from the original context so that the conventional depiction of important historical figures and the permanent, fixed approach to representing and preserving cultural memory is freed from signification and re-framed in the form of new constellations.

The categorizing strategies of this work follow a gestural logic similar to Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, or Jorge Luis Borges' *Chinese Encyclopedia*. Warburg's *Atlas* (1924-29), for instance, was a reconfiguration of images throughout history that attempted to re-map the "afterlife of antiquity" and to create new synoptic insights that followed Warburg's own metonymic and intuitive logic. Hadley+Maxwell's work is also influenced by ideas articulated by philosophers such as Michel Foucault, who scrutinized the basis of conventional knowledge and modern classifications of knowledge, arguing that these categories naturally shift over time.

Hadley + Maxwell's continuous frieze resists an obvious system of classification (such as a chronological order) so that the reliefs made from specific monuments no longer form a logic of figuration; they engage in a process of de-figuration in order to re-figure the subject. Heads, torsos and limbs are re-organized vertically while figures belonging from different geographical, social and cultural groups create new associations and meanings that shift between the generic to the particular. The archive is re-organized in every installation with different elements added and others taken away, creating a new constellation in each context.

Playing with the typical flatness of a painting or the linear frieze of Greek and Roman architecture while subverting the standard "representation" of figures and subjects, this work resists reading as a three dimensional sculpture. The freestanding Nymph figure or "shade" embodies fragments of the archive installation, establishing an interconnected "whatever-being" in a diagonal trajectory from the work on the wall. This work reflects Hadley+Maxwell's broader interest in the cinema and the montage, where fragments coalesce to make a new whole. By changing the aesthetic properties of the original object (in this case, from a permanent stone sculpture to a malleable and light-weight material that normally has another use value), the artists open up speculative possibilities and shifts in the object's meaning.





Mark Neufeld

May 8, 1906: A Film Adrift in the Cosmos, 2015

paintings, vinyl text, crates, lamp, various found objects, spotlight, 2 sculptures by Frederic Remington (The Bronco Buster, 1895 and Mountain Man, 1903) on loan from the University of Manitoba, gift of William R. Newman.

Prior to the Heist—checking the time, measuring the space, pacing

performance by Andrew Cooper, Chimera Theatre
every Thursday during the exhibition, 7:00 to 8:00pm.

Mark Neufeld is based in Winnipeg where he currently teaches at the University of Manitoba School of Art. Although Neufeld works with a variety of media, painting is the starting point for his activities. His exhibitions often take the form of installations that interweave paintings with readymade objects, assemblages and presentation strategies borrowed from the curatorial field. For Neufeld, painting belongs to a network of forms and ideas that exist in the social realm. His expanded approach to painting includes installations that function as a stage or *mis en scene* for unlikely historical and formal juxtapositions and syntheses.

Evolving from his *Performance with Two Sculptures* exhibition at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery (SAAG), Lethbridge in 2013, Neufeld's *May 8, 1906: A Film Adrift in the Cosmos* continues with research into local Kamloops histories and an interest in the vernacular of the "western." Drawing on this theme, Neufeld forges connections between painting, performance and sculpture. He considers his exhibition/installation an "object network." *May 8, 1906: A Film Adrift in the Cosmos* is conceived as an embodied film realized as multiple non-cinematic objects. The date alludes to the date of the infamous Bill Miner train robbery and the text is derived from filmmaker Jean Luc Godard's film *Weekend* in which a title card repeatedly interrupts a scene with the words *A film adrift in the Cosmos*. Like Godard, Neufeld uses this text throughout the installation as a disruption into a seamless viewing experience and a self-reflexive reminder to the viewer about his or her position as an active viewer. With these moments of text interspersed throughout, Neufeld sets up a counter rhythm to the paintings on the wall. This also occurs through the integration of three dimensional everyday objects with flat pictorial objects. This kind of correlation reflects theories put forward by philosophers like Kant, Heidegger and Hegel who suggested that the thing-in-itself is unknowable but imaginable.

With a nod to Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades, Neufeld creates a context in which objects of use (such as the wagon wheel, stool or bicycle wheel) are rendered useless. There is playful confusion between the plinth (or pedestal for the object), the object on display and the theatrical stage. Neufeld brings together a number of disparate objects that are not meant to be read as discrete objects, but rather as a fluid interplay of signs. This includes a series of small oil on canvas paintings, found objects, a re-printed newspaper from the day of the 1906 train robbery, two bronze sculptures by the well known "cowboy artist" Frederic Remington and a choreographed (mostly silent) performance by a local actor that occurs once a week. The actor is modeled after the gentleman robber character Bill Miner, who it could be argued modeled himself after the villain in the 1903 silent Western film *The Great Train Robbery*. Neufeld's performer is an unconvincing simulacrum of an upper class dandy. The script is based on two performances from the 1960s by the American artist Bruce Nauman, *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square* and *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square*. When the performance is not happening, the installation exists as a film set or stage awaiting action.

Neufeld's artistic gestures also play with curatorial practices. While researching and gathering materials for the SAAG exhibition, he discovered the iconic bronze multiples in the art collection of the University of Manitoba, where he currently teaches. Neufeld is interested in taking these sculptures out of storage and placing them into the context of contemporary art. His installation contains an atemporal dimension that merges the historical and contemporary and reconsiders artistic production and the conditions of exhibiting.





Derek Sullivan

#52, ~~Myers Briggs~~, between you and me and it,

Carmen Lamanna, 2009

coloured pencil on paper

Illustration from the Albatross (d), 2010

gouache, pencil and inkjet on paper

#88, ~~Like the kids do~~, Between here and there,

2012

coloured pencil on paper

#96, Four things happening at the same time,

2013

coloured pencil on paper

*A turn of ninety degrees is the most that one
can change direction without backtracking, 2015*

Derek Sullivan is based in Toronto, Ontario. He received his BFA from York University and his MFA from the University of Guelph. Sullivan's *Albatross Omnibus* project was commissioned by The Power Plant, Toronto, in 2011 and included 52 limited edition artist books, a new drawing and installation project and an exhibition catalogue in the form of an accordion wall. This ongoing project, presented here, explores the history of artists' book production and the "idea of the book" as a way of examining its relationship to the larger art economy and the act of reading. Referencing Baudelaire's 1857 poem, *The Albatross*, which is about an albatross rendered flightless, and the notion of the omnibus being "for all," Sullivan's project evades conventional boundaries of an exhibition and an artwork.

One of the key characteristics of Sullivan's practice is mutability. His work resists fixed meaning and often appears fragmented or incomplete; disparate images, objects and histories merge and re-bound off each other to draw attention to the

activity of reading and looking (at an artwork, an exhibition, a book) as a speculative exercise. Sullivan's work addresses authorship and appropriation and contains fluid and fluctuating references or "signs" drawn from book, furniture and garden design, concrete poetry, abstraction, minimalism and conceptual art. Sullivan's work acknowledges that reading and looking are active and changeable states of interpretation that are open to the subjectivity of the viewer's own knowledge and curiosity.

The accordion wall bisects the architectural space of the Gallery so that the work mimics and becomes the Gallery wall on which to hang the framed work. The physical form of the book both supports and is the artwork. Sullivan intervenes in the built environment and established viewing expectations to create an active viewing situation, much like a reader of a book actively produces his or her own experience and interpretation of the content inside. The role of the viewer and the act of looking are also emphasized through the reflection in the Mylar mirrors and the posters of the artist reflected in a mirror.

In some cases the wall has been left empty to let the viewer fill in the blanks and to emphasize the notion of the work being open and incomplete. As part of his interest in avoiding fixed interpretation and acknowledging how context can transform an artwork, the titles of Sullivan's framed Poster Drawings on the finished side of the zigzag wall change and are extended with each presentation, often pointing to spelling mistakes or including additional information about the current exhibition. The poster series charts the artist's varied research, readings and experiences into a form similar to a sketchbook. The Poster Drawing, #52, *Myers-Briggs, between you and me and it, Carmen Lamanna, 2009* includes text taken from a conversation between two preeminent contemporary art dealers in Toronto in the 1970s, Av Isaacs and Carmen Lamanna, whose observations about art express the intuitive and personal response one can have with art works.

The materials Sullivan uses reflect so-called low art practices: coloured pencil, gouache, watercolour and collage, while the drawings themselves recall and at the same time resist the neutrality of the monochrome typical of modernist abstraction. The format of the poster itself suggests the ever-changing and temporal multiple. Also meant to be read as part of the whole rather than as discrete objects, the posters on the unfinished side of the wall are embedded directly into the wall itself.



