

All day within the dreamy house

Exhibition Review for Visual Arts News

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This season at the Rooms Provincial Gallery, Director/Curator Vicky Chainey Gagnon brings us *All day within the dreamy house*, a five person exhibition featuring Marlene MacCallum (Corner Brook, NL), Kym Greeley (St. John's, NL), Regina Silveira (Sao Paulo, Brazil), Olivia Boudreau (Montreal), and Sheila Pye (Toronto).

Jumping off a literary reference from Lord Alfred Tennyson's poem *Mariana* (1830), the exhibition explores the curatorial premise that these five artists re-stage the domestic interior as a place of possibility, imagination and creation. Our literary ghost, Mariana comes to us from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1630), where "Mariana in the moated grange" waits alone in melancholic isolation for her lover Angelo who has abandoned her. For Tennyson, she does not sleep much either, instead looking out her window while the shadows of the poplar trees play upon her bed. All around her however, the dreamy house is active with its hinges creaking, blue flies singing, and even a mouse scuttling about.

It is within this activation of the domestic, its architectures and contexts across time, that Chainey Gagnon brings forth five contemporary Marianas for us to consider. Their overlapping views of the domestic play across the gallery on level four of The Rooms asking us to re-narrativize the domestic interior as a space of transgression much like public space has become an object of civic debate and a site of social action. Furthermore, "the goal here was to enter into dialogue with current conversation in curating and more generally, with the long history of museum display", says Chainey Gagnon. The question is, can these images challenge our pre-conceived notions of the domestic while played out within the greater structure of the gallery, a traditionally patriarchal space?

According to the curator this turning is explored through five different gazes throughout the exhibition. While MacCallum utilizes a documentary gaze, Greeley implores partial vision, Silveira dizzies, Boudreau envelops, and Pye complicates our sense of safety. Additional display strategies such as an organic non-chronological hang for MacCallum's photogavres, darkened walls, and moving images across asymmetrical site-lines further disrupt our experience of the 'white cube'. These overlapping views and viewplanes ask us to reconsider our relationship to the domestic.

Based in Corner Brook, NL, where she teaches in the Visual Arts Program at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University, Marlene MacCallum's rich history of photogavres and artist books hang in pairs and other relationships for *All day within the dreamy house*. MacCallum has been working with photogavres for over 20 years. Though these smoky images are devoid of human subject, they elicit an intimate feeling of nostalgia, tinged with internal tension in how the camera witnesses the intersection of hard edges and soft dappled light. These images reveal sensory and temporal paradoxes.

"I begin by making photographic records, prompted by a visual occurrence that challenges my perceptual habits – something that startles me out of my routine relationship with objects and spaces. From the archive of these ephemeral moments, I then build suites of prints or artist's books that offer the viewer a sense of the strangely familiar," says MacCallum.

Travelling across the exhibition space we encounter more open windows and portals, this time through Montreal artist Olivia Boudreau's *Interior* 2012, a silent double projection video work on two stand-alone frames. Near life size, we experience this work as if we are inside this room. There is a ghost here too, a woman who passes from one video to the next closing the window, only for it to open again in an endless loop. Here Boudreau offers a study in inaction, the subtle, and the slow, for there is much to be learned from stillness.

Shifting perspective both formally and conceptually, São Paulo artist Regina Silveira's *Escada Inxplicavel 3 (Branca)* 1999, a vinyl and PVC installation, fills the anterior wall of the gallery. It's a vertigo inducing drawing of a whirling staircase that flips our perspective of the domestic quite literally, black and white outlines shifting back and forth in time and space. A critical figure in Brazilian conceptual art, Silveira studied lithography, woodcut, and painting, investigating the representation of reality through perspective play and the space between presence and absence.

One of the most striking relationships between the works within *All day within the dreamy house* is this question of what is inside and what is outside and the value which we place upon these seemingly opposed spaces. For St. John's artist Kym Greeley the five paintings in this exhibition explore this tension through an unexpected palette and a super flat rendering of domestic architectures. These works thwart expectation, be it in the pea-green sky that feels more object than space or the heroic growth of a common houseplant.

"These drawings were made in a time, where I had very limited surroundings. I didn't do any traveling for 8-10 months and even when I did travel, I was still bound to the inside of a house. My eyes were forced to focus on the same thing day in and day out. The plant on the mantel was a comfort, watching it grow. From day to day and week to week I would notice how it would take on different shapes and forms", notes Greeley.

The final work in the exhibition by Toronto artist Sheila Pye *Untitled* 2002 is a 7min 16mm film in a small space off the main gallery. Pye returns to a childhood memory through a dreamy and violent narrative that transpires within an abandoned house. Further disrupting our sense of safety, the film plays out in a non-linear fashion and ends with the young woman escaping from the house that holds her captive. Pye's work invokes an additional conversation about the social and gendered history of domestic spaces which are at times violent and concealed.

It is evident within *All day within the dreamy house* that there remains a strong relationship to historical images of women and indeed the representation of domestic architectures. Yet through these five contemporary artists, the attention is their own. The works in this exhibition listen more than demand, a decidedly feminist approach that allows for a productive, subtle, and layered response to the possibility of the domestic as a space of imagination and creation.

Mary MacDonald is an artist, critic, and independent curator currently residing in St. John's, NL. Mary specializes in ephemeral exhibition structures, interdisciplinary approaches to curating, and community collaboration. www.mfmacdonald.com