

TOURING EXHIBITION PROPOSAL

Brenda Francis Pelkey: A Retrospective

Organized and circulated by the Art Gallery of Windsor
Curated by Catharine Mastin, PhD

Project and Touring Exhibition Timeline

The Art Gallery of Windsor (AGW) is organizing a retrospective exhibition of the work of nationally-recognized artist Brenda Francis Pelkey which will be presented at the AGW from October 21, 2016 to January 22, 2017. The exhibition is being offered for national tour to three interested venues beginning in the spring of 2017 and continuing through the summer of 2018.

The Exhibition

The exhibition will be the first retrospective examination of Pelkey's work and her first solo exhibition organized by the AGW since she moved to Windsor in 2003, where she has continued to develop her art practice addressing themes of feminist subjectivity. Pelkey came to Windsor from Saskatoon to serve as Director of the School of Visual Arts at the University of Windsor, a position she held until 2012. Today, she continues an active role as professor and an established artist working in Canadian contemporary art.

Over the past three decades, Pelkey's works have been the subject of many solo and group-artist exhibitions in Canada and northwestern Europe, including: Museum of Photography, Helsinki, Finland; London Guildhall University, UK; Ramai Modern (Mendel Art Gallery), Saskatoon; MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina; Thames Art Gallery, Chatham; and the Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina among others. Her works are held in several major public collections including several of those listed above as well as: Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa; Winnipeg Art Gallery; Confederation Centre for the Arts, Charlottetown; University of Saskatchewan; and the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

A career-review as proposed by this retrospective is a timely undertaking to widen knowledge on Pelkey's contributions to contemporary photography and to expand awareness of her work through public art gallery venues and the places she has lived in the Prairies, central Canada and the East Coast throughout her life. The exhibition will begin with a selection of her early documentary works from the *Foundry* project (1988) and include those major bodies of works which have since challenged the documentary role of photography to deploy the medium as one of rich social and psychological impact. Pelkey's practice first demonstrated these latter concerns in 1989 when those photographs comprising the exhibition, *the great effect of the imagination on the world* (1988-89) were shown. Since then, Pelkey has continued to evolve these themes of psychic and social identity with photographs of landscapes, urban sites and people. The exhibition will reflect these projects to include selections from *dreams of life and death* (1991-94), *Memento Mori* (1994-96), *Oblivion* (1996-97), *As if there were grace* (1999-2000), *Haunts* (2000-01), *Spaces of Transformation* (2004-05), and her recent work addressing civic subjects such as provincial court room interiors (2005-08) and the Windsor Aquatic Training Centre under construction (2012-15).

The Artist's Work

As artist-cartographer-photographer, Pelkey opens the multiple possibilities of female subjectivity in public and private spaces to challenge geographies which have been normalized as male spaces. Her work contributes to an innovative kind of social geography, one in which the subject's view is challenged to consider heterogeneous options. The works invite viewers to imagine outcomes of events past, present and future which may have happened, be happening, and could happen in those spaces. Feminist scholar Gillian Rose explains the potential role of feminism in reshaping social geography in contemporary life: "Feminist explorations of the different spaces of the contemporary city often reject the search for totality from a position of complete knowledge. Their work is more tentative, more

grounded in the details of the everyday, and more likely to interpret social life and spaces in the city in terms of a radical heterogeneity.”(*Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, 1993, p. 133)

To explore such social geographies, Pelkey often works at times of the day when the subject is cast in partial or full darkness — night, sundown and sunrise. At the heart of her feminist approach is not that historically masculine lens which has also worked to exclude women from the social scene of night as a dangerous place for the sexualized female body, but is rather a place where women are present and have voice, where the female artist can facilitate the process of interpretation and meaning. With the artificial augmentation of intense and brilliant movie lights, Brenda Pelkey’s photographs bring dark subjects on the edge of visibility into prominence and into the world of the visible.

From the particularized suburban front and backyards adorned with elements of personal memory and identity, to dark roads at night, to expansive coastal ocean scenes, to empty hospital beds of the admitted yet waiting and recovering ill, and to strip-dance poles in empty bars, Pelkey exposes the still-gendered yet changing contours of social spaces in contemporary life. When working with daytime subjects such as starkly lit and empty courtrooms, the viewer is asked to pause over details such as the tissue box set carefully to accommodate the strained witness whose experience at the witness stand we are not privy to but yet anticipate the details of in courtroom testimony and tomorrow’s news. It is such narrative tensions and mysteries that are at the centre of Pelkey’s work in the photographic medium.

Exhibition Contents — Key Loans

The exhibition will consist of 35-40 works per venue. The selection of works is focused to account for the artist’s larger-scale wall and sound installations comprising the *Haunts* series (*Ocean* and *Forest III*) among other works, and address the needs of a works on paper rotation not exceeding six month exposure for public collection lenders. Only the works coming from the artist’s collection will be presented at all venues. To ensure consistency among venues, a balanced representation of the artist’s practice throughout the exhibition has been carefully considered to include equivalent examples from all of the artist’s major bodies of work.

Exhibition Square Footage

- Estimated 3,500 - 4,000 square feet, depending on the borrower’s exhibition space capacity.

List of Lenders

- Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa
- Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown, PEI
- Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina Public Library, Saskatchewan
- Kenderdine Art Gallery, University of Saskatchewan, Regina
- MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina
- McMaster University Art Collection, Hamilton
- Remai Modern, Saskatoon
- National Gallery of Canada & Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa
- Saskatchewan Arts Board, Regina
- Winnipeg Art Gallery, Manitoba
- The Artist, Windsor

The Essays and Book

Pending confirmation of Access to Heritage Funding through Museums Assistance Program, a printed publication is planned in English and French languages with essays and statements by contributors Martha Langford, Nancy Yakimoski, Catharine Mastin and the artist. Additional to these will be a biography and exhibition history of the artist, bibliography and list of works in the exhibition.

Available Bookings

(12 weeks in duration)

1. Spring-Summer 2017
2. Fall 2017
3. Winter 2018
4. Spring-Summer 2018

Exhibition Rental Fee and Inclusions

Please contact us regarding the exhibition rental fee

- Venues can apply separately to Canadian Heritage, Exhibition Circulation Fund for additional support for shipping costs
- Fee includes crating and production costs
- Exhibition graphics in PDF format will be provided for borrower use
- Includes five (5) complimentary copies of the publication
- Includes assistance from exhibition curator for layout as per the proposed exhibition themes and groupings

General Borrower Responsibilities

- Condition reporting on arrival and departure
- Insurance
- Production of didactics materials from supplied PDF files

Further Information

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Selected Images



Brenda Francis Pelkey; *Ocean*, 2001; Collection of the artist



Brenda Francis Pelkey; *Courtroom (Windsor)*, 2005-08



Brenda Francis Pelkey; *Pool and Stanchions*, 2012-13



Brenda Francis Pelkey; *Power Pole*, ca. 1991-94; Collection of the artist