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They Made A Day Be A Day Here / curated by Amy Fung.

A catalogue of the travelling exhibition *They Made A Day Be A Day Here*, held at the Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Grande Prairie, Alberta, June 7 to August 25, 2013; Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, September 27, 2013 to January 5, 2014; School of Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

A survey exhibition featuring artwork by twelve contemporary Canadian artists: Amalie Atkins, Heather Benning, Jennifer Bowes, Tammi Campbell, Brenda Draney, Wednesday Lupypciw, Sarah Anne Johnson, Maria Madacky, Mary-Anne McTrowe, Divya Mehra, Jennifer Stillwell, Leesa Streifler.

Includes essays by Shawna Dempsey, Lorri Millan, Anthea Black & Nicole Burisch, and Joan Borsa with artist portraits by Amy Fung.

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Leesa Streifler

My first time in the Dunlop Art Gallery was for *Pandora's Box* (2008). It was a ten-person show featuring an international lineup of female artists. Ever since then, I have always been a little surprised by how empty the Dunlop feels.

Besides Kara Walker's video work—a work that was available at the Dunlop, but not at Plug In's reincarnation—I had been repeatedly drawn to Leesa Streifler's *Life Force in Two Realms (the social and the spiritual)* (2008). Revisiting photographs of herself at five and fifteen years old, the work revealed the transition of the socialized female psyche from child to young adult. Between works from Kenya and New York, I had no idea at the time that Leesa was living and working at the University of Regina. That was the grace of *Pandora's Box*—it focused on a globalized feminine experience.

On the road with Divya Mehra a few years later, we stopped in Regina for dinner with Leesa. On this trip, I also learned that Divya had worked for and studied under Kara Walker in Columbia. Leesa had had Rosalind Kraus for a teacher when she was a student in New York. These are what I call cosmic constellations.

Before attending Hunter College in New York and living there for several years, Leesa grew up in Winnipeg, attended the University of Manitoba, and found influence in the surrealist works of Esther Warkov. Leesa went on to become the first female faculty member at the University of Regina, which is now a largely female-led faculty that includes Ruth Chambers and Rachele Viadler Knowles.

When I finally met Leesa, she had been teaching herself to paint again. It was a chilly winter morning on Toronto Street in Regina and I didn't have a very good ice scraper in my rental car. I was to follow Leesa's vehicle out of town to her cottage and studio in Craven. Our first meeting was like most strangers and neighbours in the Prairies, helping each other get out of the snow by scraping off frost in the semi-dawn.

We drove through rolling hills and sweeping vistas before arriving at Leesa's quiet cottage. Deer were spotted grazing not too far away. The top of her garage had been converted into a sunlit studio. Our conversation poured out openly and honestly as we talked about who she is and who she has become. I found Leesa to be both a woman and a child in one, body and mind, demonstrating absolute clarity in examining her past while exuberantly breaking out and experiencing all the joys of being alive.

In her new paintings, she was not interested in realism, but in distorting reality into expression. She was painting not towards a show, but to learn how to represent herself in the world by unknowing all expectations—to create from a place of freedom. She began painting portraits of herself as animals, and as she saw her own body in the mirror. The colours were all bright and garish, screaming the vogue fantastical. They were more challenging than comforting.

I was still doing studio visits at the time without any inkling that this would become a generational show consisting mostly of artists under the age of forty. As that framework began taking shape, I kept thinking about Leesa. I just had to include her in the show. I did not want the reconsiderations of herself at five and fifteen; I wanted to know what she thought of herself as she was now.

While being the most established artist in the show with over twenty-five years of teaching experience behind her, she is also taking the biggest risk. Exuding the most confidence in how she wanted to be represented, as an artist, as a woman, Leesa's is the only work that is looking right back at you.



Leesa Streifler

Her House, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 60h x 42w inches

What's There, 2010, oil on canvas, 36h x 42w inches

Passage, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 60h x 42w inches



Leesa Streifler, *Passage*, 2010, acrylic on canvas,
60h x 42w inches

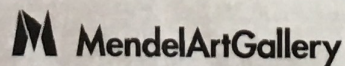
Image courtesy of the artist


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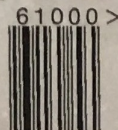
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