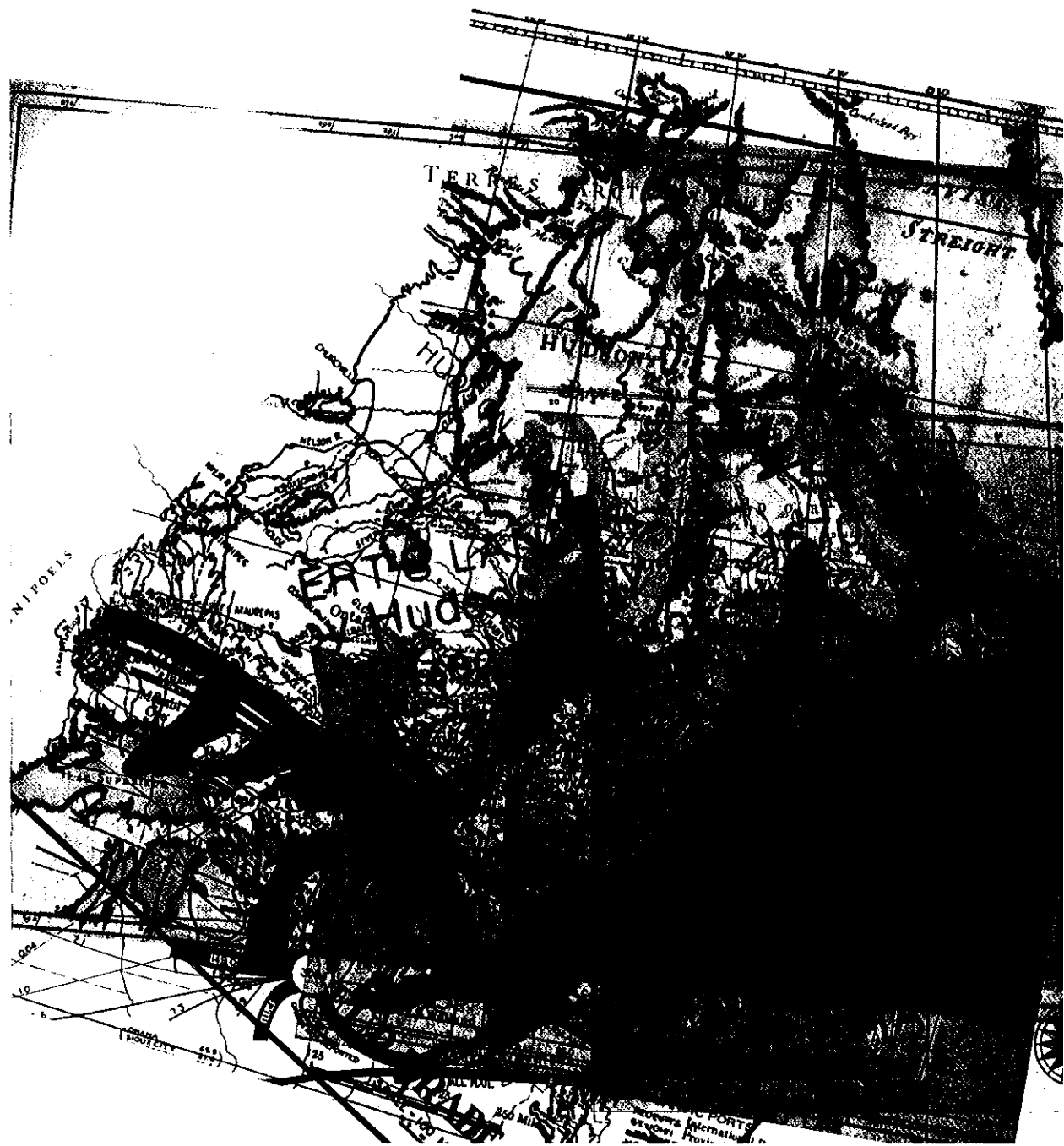


Real Estate: Ceremonies of Possession



Art Gallery of Regina

Judy Anderson

Mark Anderson

Nicole Brabant

Peter Dillman

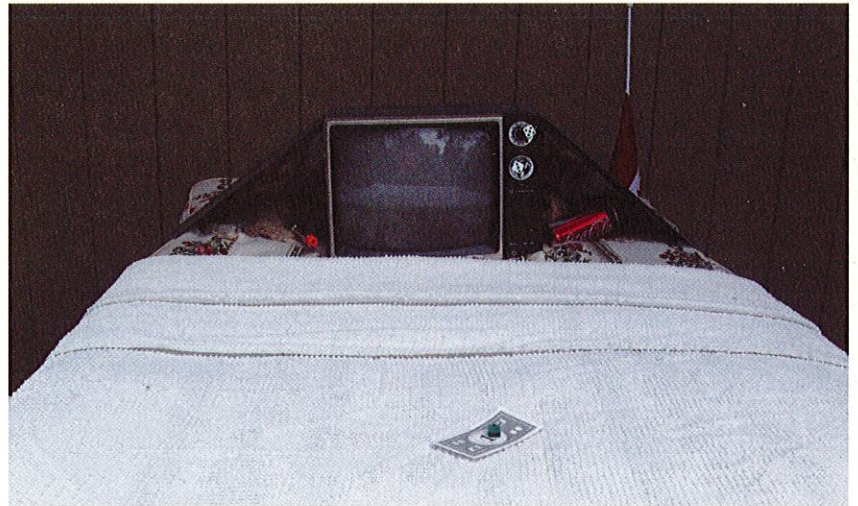
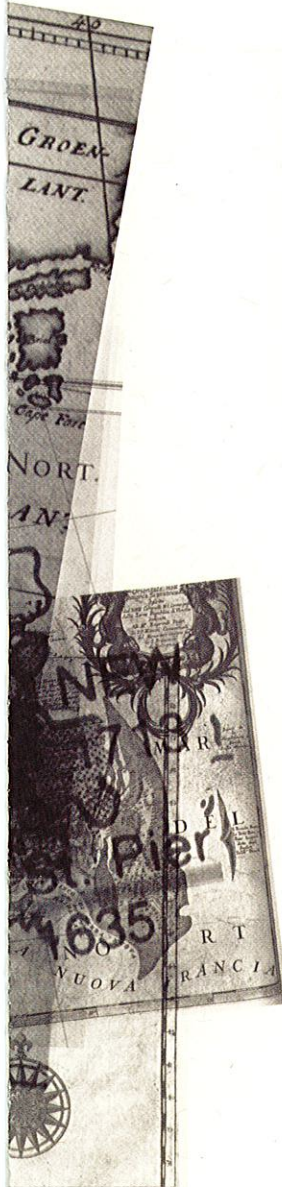
David Garneau

Gerald McMaster

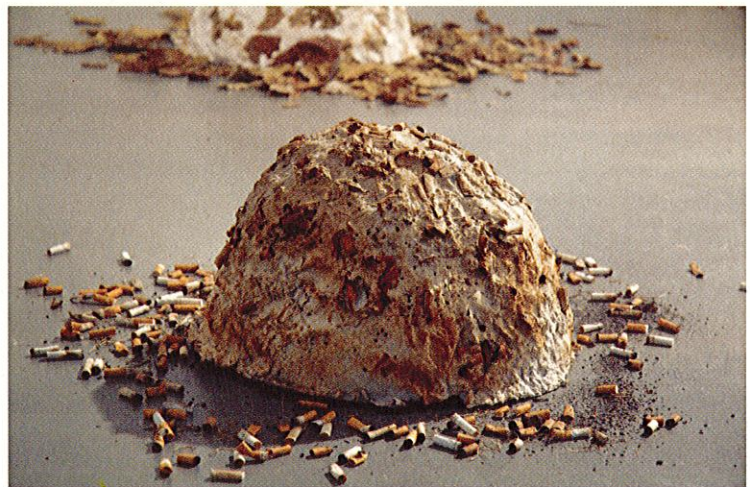
Barbara Meneley

Jason Thiry

September 4 to October 13, 2007

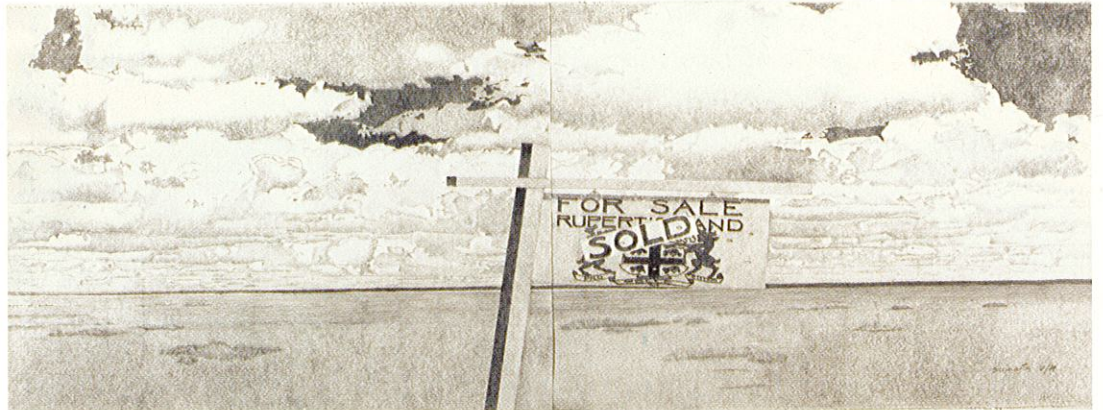


Mark Anderson, (detail) *'No, Man Is an Island'*, box spring and mixed media, 107 cm x 183 cm, 2007

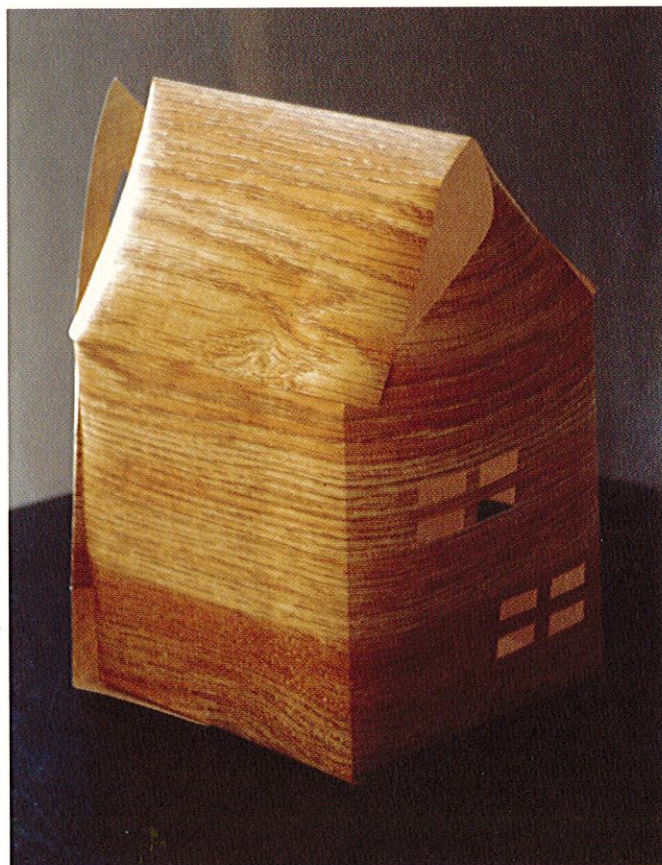


Judy Anderson, (detail) *'Looking Beyond'*, handmade paper, traditional plant materials, cigarettes, installation 183 cm x 183 cm, 2004

Cover: Nicole Brabant, *'St. Lawrence Survey'*, inkjet print, 43 cm x 48 cm, 2007



Gerald McMaster, 'For Sale: Rupert's Land', graphite on paper, diptych 56 cm x 154 cm, 1986. Collection of the Native Heritage Foundation of Canada.



Barbara Meneley, (detail) 'Reality', wallpaper, naugahyde, screen, tarpaper, 8 pieces 13 cm x 13 cm x 25 cm each, 2006

Real Estate: Ceremonies of Possession

The real estate market is heating up. With housing prices setting records across Canada and especially in Regina, our connection to houses, to real estate, and to mortgages seems stronger than ever. Buying and selling land consumes us as we consume real estate. Yet, how is it that we conceive of our homes and the land we live upon? The commodification of land and consumerism attempt to drain the spiritual association that binds us to the land. This exhibition assembles a diverse group of artists who ponder notions of land, ownership, and our ceremonies of possessing the land.

In pre-contact times, Indigenous peoples in the Americas exploited the land to their benefit. Relationships varied but included a respect and intimate connection with Mother Earth. Indigenous peoples ceremonially thanked the earth for its riches and lived harmoniously with the land, for the most part. Today, many Indigenous peoples still relate to the land in similar ways, yet at times colonization has skewed original protocols.

Conversely, Europeans took possession of their newly claimed America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through various convoluted rites, some of which continue to influence and dictate Canadian laws concerning land ownership. The English acquired possession of land in the New World through the establishment of physical objects, that is, by building houses and fences. The more theatrical French seized their turf by elaborate gestures aimed at gaining the consent of the invaded. The Portuguese showed their legitimate dominion by announcing their discoveries by latitude, the Dutch by describing their lands through detailed maps, while the Spanish laid their claims by reading the Requirimiento, an ultimatum threatening war.¹

Creating an imperial authority over the Americas has brought Canadians to contemporary understandings of real estate. Cree artist Gerald McMaster's 1984 large graphite drawing *For Sale: Rupert's Land* questions the sale of traditional land and appraises cultural relationships of possession of territory. The enormous land parcel called Rupert's Land went up for sale by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1869. It encompassed almost eight million square kilometers, including most of the prairies, and parts of what are now northern Quebec, northern Ontario, and Nunavut. George Brown, editor of *The Globe* and a Father of Confederation, described it as "the vast and fertile territory which is our birthright—and which no power on earth can prevent us occupying."² The vast land was sold to the new government of Canada for 1.5 million dollars on March 20, 1869. This enormous real estate transaction changed the face of this land for Indigenous peoples, the Métis, and quickly opened the West for settlement. The problematics of land ownership and real estate transactions continue to characterize Canadian cultural identity.

The historic commodification of land parcels on the Prairie inspires Métis artist David Garneau. Researching the historical elements of the Carleton Trail, a path of resistance after the failure of the Red River resistance (1869-70), the works act as a series of "beaded maps," aerial views, that explore the Métis river lot system colliding with the British/Canadian square system of land lot allocation. Garneau explores the shape

given to the land by governmental parceling before and after resistance. Dotting the landscape, beadwork designs elaborate yet defy the systematic control of the land inspiring an intertextual reading of the canvases. Like McMaster's *Red River Cart*, the art considers Métis land rights.

Cartography has historically served a distinctive role in colonial efforts. From the earliest trials to map this vast land to the latest computer imaging available on the web in the form of Google Earth, conceptions of land ownership reinforced by maps remains a seemingly solid construction that dictates notions of identity and real estate. Exploring the motivations to map and control the land, like Garneau, Métis artist Nicole Brabant engages the colonial practice of mapping in her art.

Brabant utilizes overlays of actual historic maps to comment on constructed power maps hold over our land. By repositioning the maps, overlapping layers of geopolitical cartographic realities, the resultant designs and shapes question the absolute control given over to maps. Brabant forces viewers to reconsider the constructed notions associated with mapping and land ownership with her surveys.

Negotiating colonial structures also informs the work of Cree artist Judy Anderson. In *Looking Beyond* Anderson gathers together traditional medicines in her installation piece where mounds—tummies emerge from the earth covered in traditional plants now tainted by colonization—cigarettes, rather than natural tobacco, for example dot one mound. Still, traditional medicines remain present, offering decolonizing and healing directions.

The bed we sleep upon can be viewed as a form of ceremonial possession of our real estate holdings. After all, we mostly spend more time in bed (watching tv?) than anywhere else. Mark Anderson confronts masculine notions of dominant popular culture, consumerism and colonization, from his bed—complete with a tv pillow, six-shooter, condoms, and a plastic house plunked down on a \$1.00 bill from the game of Monopoly in *No, Man Is An Island*.

Barbara Meneley acknowledges that a comfortable home and a safe place to rest is common to all Canadians in her work *Reality*. She conveys the ethereal qualities of real estate with her uniform cut-out house patterns. In both three-dimensional and two-dimensional form, the flimsy houses, constructed of building materials such as wallpaper, window screen, tar paper, and naugahyde, question the sense of stability and the notion of comfort as commodity.

Peter Dillman questions our relationship with our homes in *Precipice*. He unsettles the cozy relationships we have with our homes. His paintings continually engage our understanding of home, land and the prairie. *Cold Highway* comments on the pathways and directions superimposed on our sometimes Prairie landscape.

In *Down Denver* and *Ptarmigan* Jason Thiry uses wallpaper scraps, typically employed to beautify our real estate interiors, to recreate monumental skyscrapers. He comments on ironic efforts to artificially define our living spaces while grappling with the imposing modernist disconnect with the land. The discourse on real estate shifts as Thiry's work considers notions of Modernist architecture and issues related to the concept of form follows function. Urban landscapes take precedent in this work and demand yet another reading of real estate.

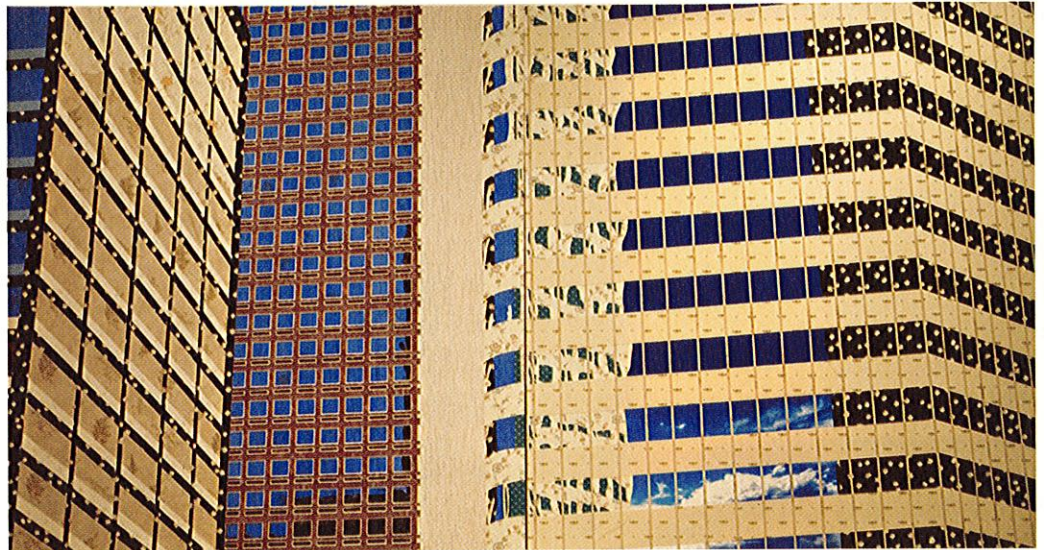
Taking possession of the land in a settler nation remains fraught with diverse emotional, political, social, and physical ramifications. The spaces we inhabit resonate

with historical and contemporary baggage. Real estate sales may be sizzling, but before signing the next real estate deal, think about how meanings are derived from that piece of turf you hope to own.

Carmen Robertson
Guest Curator

1 Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* Cambridge, NY: Cambridge UP, 1995.

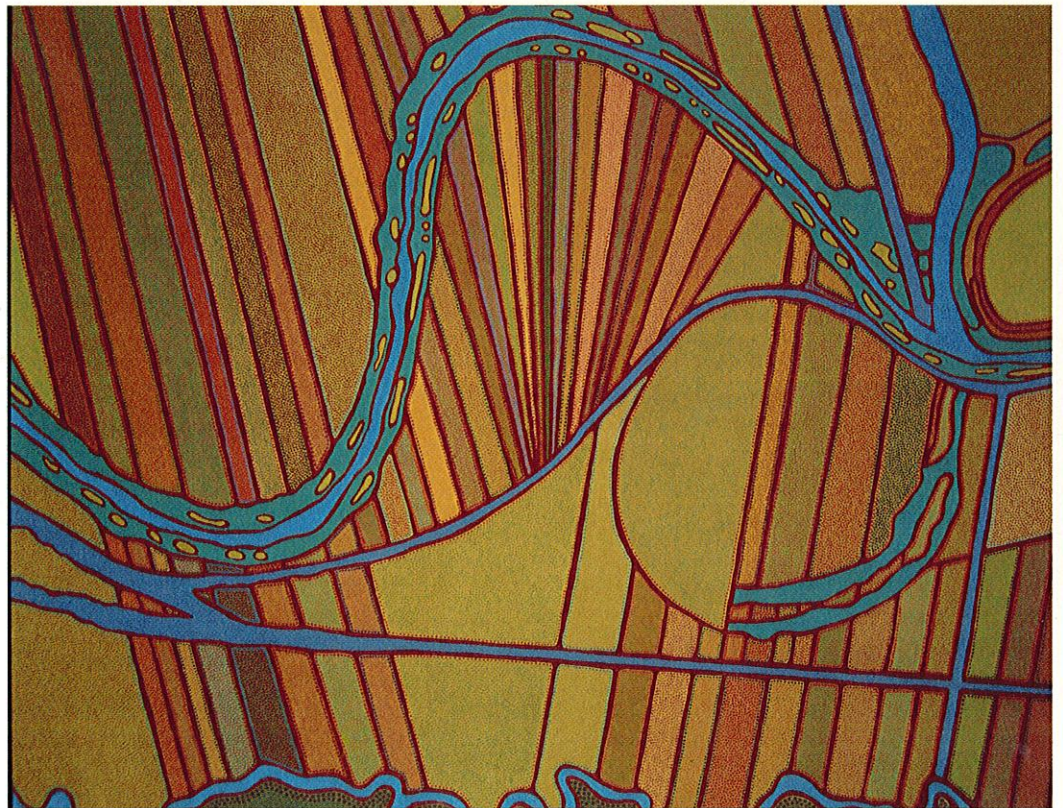
2 George Brown, "Acquisition of the North-West," in Alexander MacKenzie, *The Life and Speeches of Hon. George Brown*, Toronto, The Globe Printing Company, 1882, 381p., pp. 102-107.



Jason Thiry, 'Down Denver', wallpaper and mixed media, 122 cm x 183 cm, 2005



Peter Dillman, '*Precipice*', acrylic on canvas, 76 cm x 122 cm, 2003



David Garneau, '*Beaded Map: Red River 1870s*', acrylic on canvas, 153 cm x 123 cm, 2007

ART GALLERY OF REGINA

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