

Elevate & Holon Audio Tour

Welcome to the exhibition *Elevate & Holon* at the Art Gallery of Regina. This two-person exhibition includes drawings by Regina-born and raised artist Nikki Middlemiss and sculpture by Moose Jaw-based artist Peter Tucker.

Many people perceive abstract art as merely geometric, lacking content. Abstraction popularly signals the toxic masculinity of mid-twentieth century abstract expressionism: formal, intellectual & unfeeling. Historically & today, abstract artists seek to represent not what already exists but to invent a new language to express what we don't have words for, such as the passage of time, decay, mortality, experiences of difference and a swarm of individuals coming together as one organism.

Before starting the exhibition audio tour, I would like to remind you not to touch the artworks, even ones as appealingly tactile as Nikki Middlemiss and Peter Tuckers. Natural oils from your fingertips are harmful to the delicately adhered pigments and carefully crinkled paper of Nikki Middlemiss' drawings. Although Peter Tucker's sculpture *Holon* looks like it is floating, it is very heavy. Touching, even carefully, is not permitted in the exhibition; the artists have provided small samples of their work for you to explore through touch, located outside the gallery entrance on the shelf to the left of the door. Please also be aware of your movements, coats, and bags. You may leave your jacket on the coat rack in the foyer.

I'm Sandee Moore, curator of exhibitions and programming at the Art Gallery of Regina. I'm excited to introduce you to the deeply-felt and inexpressible in the work of Nikki Middlemiss and Peter tucker in this audio tour of the exhibition *Elevate & Holon*.

We'll start the tour by going to the left through the entrance door and moving clockwise through the gallery. You'll see the exhibition didactic panel on the wall right beside the door with the artists' names (Peter Tucker and Nikki Middlemiss), the exhibition title (*Elevate & Holon*), exhibition dates and a short introduction to the exhibition written by me.

Photos are allowed. If you post photographs of the exhibition online, be sure to credit the artist and tag the Art Gallery of Regina.

There are five drawings by Nikki Middlemiss on the wall to the left of the door.

The first drawing in the elevate series is a ball of multiple broken arches, mimicking the scattering of light bouncing off water. The large sheet of rice paper hangs from an acrylic rod, underscoring the delicacy of this nearly weightless paper. Unlike the transparency and translucency of the ground and hanging mechanism, Middlemiss used the opaque watercolour medium of gouache to create this drawing.

It is tempting to draw visual analogies between this dayglow pink orb and the geodesic dome, a remnant of Expo 67 that marks the skyline of Middlemiss' resident city, Montreal. However, drawing for Middlemiss is not about depicting but about the process, letting her materials author the work as much as she does herself.

The delicate textures of her weightless drawings trace a sensitive record of their creation (and deterioration), leading viewers to ultimately reflect upon the fragility, resilience, and unpredictability of our lives.

Next, we encounter three pale grey drawings stacked on top of each other. Middlemiss creates an atmosphere of ghostly ethereality with her choice of smokey grey spray acrylic pigment, through which segments of the pale, raw paper gleam like scars. As viewers crane their necks to see the uppermost drawing in this triptych, it is easy to imagine the delicate tracery of lines is a canopy of sparks falling to earth from a firework's explosion.

The last drawing by Middlemiss on this wall is composed of two panels in different materials. The top panel is an arch-shaped piece of tracing paper with a nearly invisible application of white acrylic. Absence is profoundly present as the lack of paint creates the vaulted, articulated lines in the top panel. The bottom panel is a sheet of olive-tinted glass. We see the artist playing with various modes of materiality, transparency, and texture in juxtaposing a heavy pane of glass with rice paper. The inclusion of the glass is a witty reference to the notion that paintings are a method of providing an appealing view when windows don't overlook an attractive prospect.

We'll move along to the gallery's back wall, where three large-scale drawings by Nikki Middlemiss hang.

The first drawing, called *Untitled (Elevate Series)*, is comprised of two overlapped paper cutouts, disrupting ideas of figure and ground, incorporating the wall and the air into the composition. The brilliant safety orange of this drawing calls across the room to the first drawing in the elevates series, inviting us to read this as a disintegration of the tightly balled grouping of lines. The bulging lobes at the edges of the paper suggest a flaccid structure or the buoyant forms of clouds.

Once again, the artist creates a tension between density and dispersion. The shadows cast on the rippled surface and the wall multiply the crescents in her composition. She enhances their transient and weightless qualities by floating her drawings away from the wall.

Throughout the exhibition, we see the artist using the same approach but varying her media and line. She tapes out a series of identical arches, overlapping the shapes to create the illusion of density or having the lines disperse as if fading away before applying pigment.

She deliberately wets the fragile paper to create drawings that are almost sculptural in their texture. Middlemiss' large-scale drawings are collaborations with her materials, the fortuitous magic of vellum and liquid media authoring the work as much as the artist. The thin membranes of translucent paper buckle, pucker, dimple, and wrinkle in response to spray acrylic and distilled water applications while folding or sanding crisscrosses the surface with pale scars.

Here we see a blotchy cloud of black droplets engulfing a snarl of pale curves. We can also see where the artist used a felt pen to edit the voids left when she removed the tape lines to reintroduce randomness and remove the crispness of her signature process.

A series of tightly spaced, flattened arcs creates an illusion of space and glimmering light in the next drawing. We see how the translucent paper changes colour, reflecting light or soaking up shadow, making the faint streaks come alive. The artist has used the same dove grey acrylic paint as in the earlier triptych; the effect is equally misty and insubstantial.

On the adjoining wall is Nikki Middlemiss's final drawing: a two-panel composition of a narrow white panel positioned above a dark square. The gap between the two sheets of paper is also part of the composition exemplifying the artist's notion that nothingness is critical.

This structure makes it easy to read this as a sky stretched above the land; however, Middlemiss seeks not to represent the world we know but evoke feelings and capture the action of time upon her materials.

We will circle around to view Peter Tucker's single, monumental sculpture Holon. Holon is not a

hulking monolith but a gentle spiral comprised of dozens of oblongs of different varieties of wood: bass wood, Spanish cedar, jarrah, black walnut, black cherry, mahogany, wenge and ebony.

The sculpture's title, Holon, refers to a diverse group of individuals moving as one. Tucker draws analogies between Holon's gently curving mass wooden ovoids and a school of fish, a flock of birds, and even a flurry of thoughts and ideas.

Many of Tucker's other sculptures are self-portraits telling of his experiences as a biracial (Afro-Caribbean and white European) adoptee. Tucker describes an inspiring meeting with a group of school children who didn't see difference as a reason to exclude their classmates. Unlike his formative experiences, he witnessed the radical inclusiveness of these children. Holon optimistically reflects this inclusion, where rare imported wood's beauty and uniqueness is appreciated while being united into a sculptural whole.

Although it weighs 300 pounds, PeterTucker's sculpture seems to soar hopefully toward the ceiling. Despite its size, Holon is intimate: each hand-smoothed piece of wood, the size and shape of the hollow that forms between cupped hands.

Tucker, a furniture maker for many years, applies his skill to balancing and suspending this 9-foot-tall structure so that it seems to float, transforming blocks of wood into delicate lace. The shadows Holon casts upon the wall mirror the immateriality of Middlemiss' delicate tracery of intersecting oblongs.

Thank you for visiting the Art Gallery of Regina to experience *Elevate & Holon*.

The Art Gallery of Regina is a nonprofit, public art gallery that programs contemporary art that tells the stories of Saskatchewan artists and those from adjoining treaty territories.

We are grateful to our core funders, Sk-arts and the city of Regina, who enable us to make our exhibitions free to the public while compensating artists for their work.

I especially thank you for taking the time to listen to this audio tour and attend this exhibition. You can support the Art Gallery of Regina by becoming a member, donating, or both. Visit our website, www.artgalleryofregina.ca, for details on becoming part of our gallery's community and more information about *Elevate & Holon* and the AGR's other programming.

