

G.A.S.P.R.



Todd Gronsdahl, *G.A.S.P.R.* Photo by Sam deLange.
The Saskatchewan Arts Board Permanent Collection.

What can you trust?

A diving helmet is normally made of metal with a thick glass window to seal out water and protect the diver from the crushing pressure of deep water. The G.A.S.P.R. (général appareils sous-marins personnel respiratoires) is made from duct tape, flimsy plastic and hot-glued scraps of wood. Do you think it would offer effective protection to a diver? What word does the acronym G.A.S.P.R. remind you of? Does the association with "gasp" give you confidence in this underwater breathing apparatus?



Why are there exhibits like a chicken coop and a ski jump in The Saskatchewan Maritime Museum?

The artist has invented a heroic and colourful maritime past for this province, which encompasses exploration, trade and military activity. Our history is a patchwork of stories we tell about ourselves as a province, expressed in our museums, military infrastructure, agribusiness and sport. Inspired by real events involving Saskatchewan waterways, Gronsdahl's bomb launch disguised as a ski jump relates to reports of German U-boats infiltrating the province in WWII. The chicken coop parodies bureaucratic projects aimed at enticing settlers to scratch out a living from less than ideal land, land acquired through a water-related legal loophole wherein land submerged in water automatically becomes crown land.

2420 Elphinstone St., Regina, SK
306-522-5940
AGR@sasktel.net
www.artgalleryofregina.ca

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Todd Gronsdahl, *G.A.S.P.R.2.* Photo courtesy the artist.

December 12, 2019 - February 22, 2020

Todd Gronsdahl

The Saskatchewan Maritime Museum

The Title

What does the exhibition title, **The Saskatchewan Maritime Museum**, mean?

Have you heard anyone say, "In a month of Sundays?" or "A snowball's chance in July?" These are phrases of disbelief that imply something is impossible and will never happen or never succeed. Artist Todd Gronsdahl's *Saskatchewan Maritime Museum* is a similarly impossible situation. Saskatchewan is a landlocked province; it doesn't border any oceans or seas. So, how could it have a maritime (relating to or bordering on the sea) history? The humour of Gronsdahl's museum lies in the absurdity of the concept. The nonsensical idea of a Saskatchewan maritime museum reveals that no museum presents the absolute truth. History is just a story.

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Didactic Panel

What is a **didactic panel**?

"Didactic" means that something is intended to teach or educate. Didactic panels are short pieces of writing mounted on exhibit walls and are designed to orient museum-goers to a particular topic or theme. Gronsdahl wrote the didactic panels in the Saskatchewan Maritime Museum, although his intention wasn't to educate but to poke fun at this museum convention. His use of pretentious language and convoluted stories tell us that his museum and the history it claims to present are exaggerated, if not outright lies and fabrications. By presenting hardly-believable tales, characters and events such as Frankwin Persephony Marquis' mission to navigate Saskatchewan in a seafaring whaling vessel, the artist asks us to question the authority of the museum.

Duct Tape

Why does the artist use cheap materials like scrap wood and duct tape?

When do people use duct tape? Duct tape is used to make a quick fix or put something together without considering how it looks. Generally, something assembled with duct tape isn't meant to last. Why then would Gronsdahl assemble his "museum" exhibits from duct tape then? Gronsdahl admires Saskatchewan's folk artists and inventors who re-purpose "the materials at hand" rather than use specially-suited materials. Gronsdahl admires how they transform ordinary materials with their creativity. His use of crude materials like scrap wood and duct tape to create beautifully crafted objects invites us to question why we value things made from precious materials.