RITUAL & LORE

ART GALLERY OF REGINA

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Ayla Dmyterko

Blair Fornwald &
Brette Gabel

Audie Murray

Marigold Santos

Zoë Schneider

Maia Stark

Curated by
Jess Richter

August 28 - October 31, 2020

ART
GALLERY
OF REGINA

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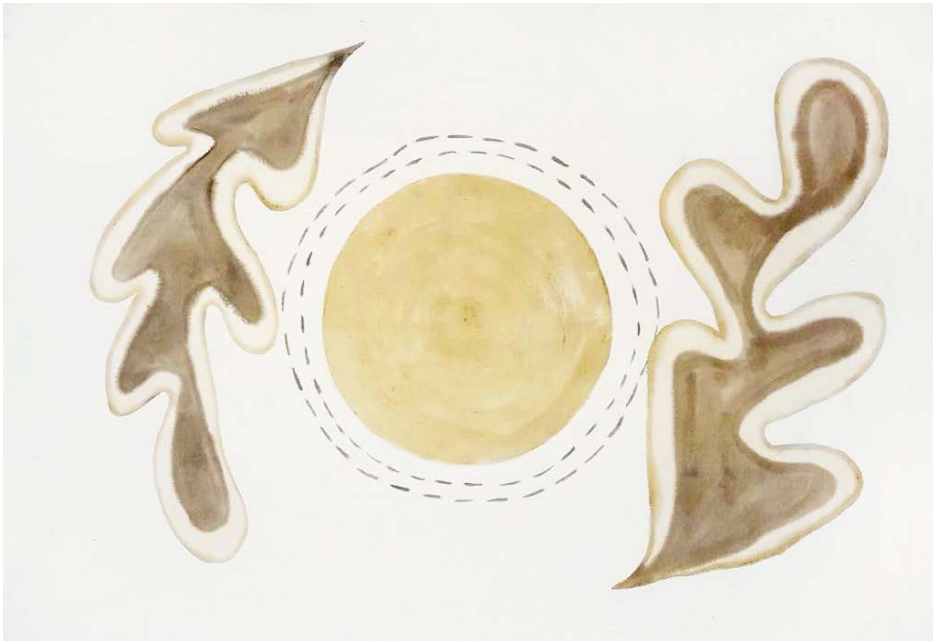


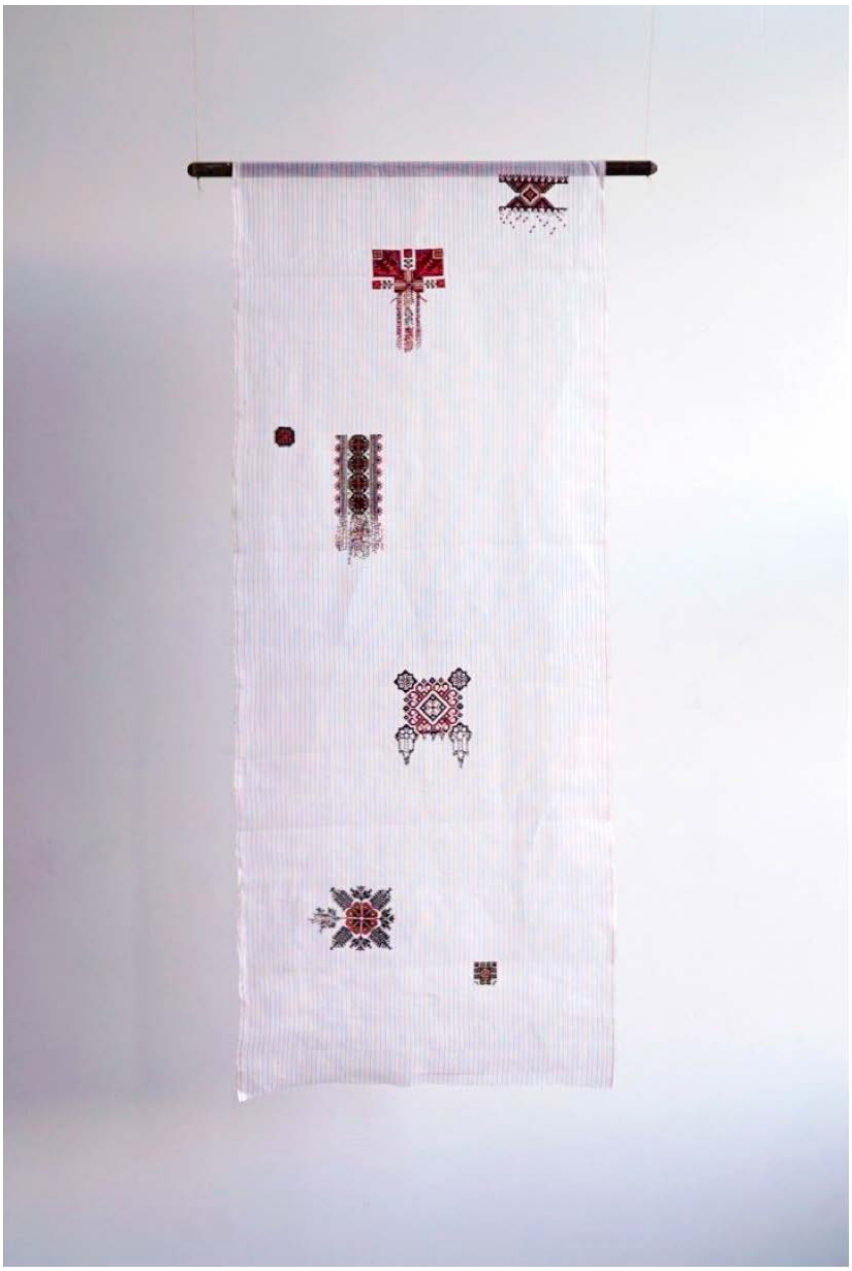
Audie Murray,

Portal Rug,
canvas, harvested acorn hat ink,
harvested acorn nut ink, chestnut ink,
53 x 78 inches

Portal Rug (detail),

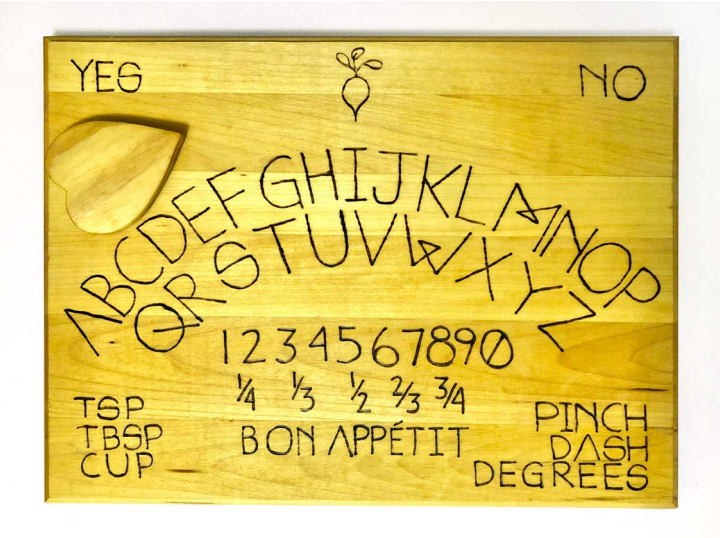
Audie Murray,
Enn Modeuz (film still), 2019

Ayla Dmyterko,
Solastalgic Soliloquy (video still), 2020,
single-channel digital video



Ayla Dmyterko,
Veils of Forgetfulness, 2019,
embroidery thread, waste canvas,
wooden dowel, 63 x 33.5 inches

Ayla Dmyterko,
Veils of Forgetfulness (installation detail), 2019,
embroidery thread, waste canvas,
wooden dowel,
63 x 33.5 inches



Blair Fornwald and Brette Gabel

Recipe Book of the Dead, 2015,
custom-made wooden
Ouija board and planchette,
16 x 12 inches

Recipe Book of the Dead, 2015–2020,
quilt with embroideries on muslin,
160 x 60 inches

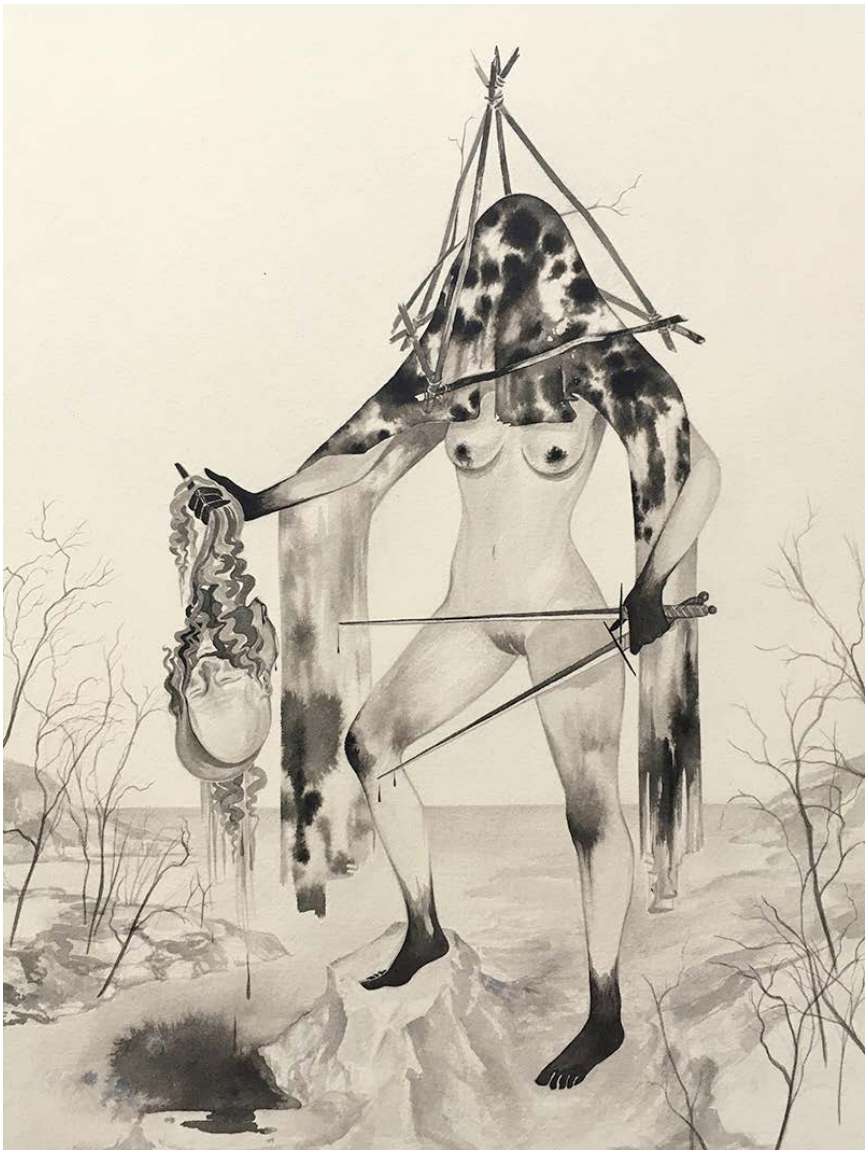
Zoë Schneider

Moon Pools, 2017–2020
cement, gravel, mica flakes, gold vinyl altar cloth,
growth materials: avocado oil, chamomile tea,
rose quartz, green calcite, epoxy sculpt gold-leafed
potato chips, grapes, wheat, cat min blossoms,
chamomile blossoms, potatoe blossoms
reduction materials: amethyst, blue apatite, green
tea, dill, spearmint, chili pepper plant leaves, lettuce,
kale dried chili pepper, water,
dimensions variable

Moon Pools (installation detail)

Zoë Schneider,
Last Ditch (video still), 2019,
video

Marigold Santos,
shroud (dirty harvester), 2015,
ink on paper,
22 x 30 inches



Marigold Santos,
shroud (two swords), 2016,
ink on paper,
15 x 11.5 inches

Maia Stark,
How it Feels, 2020,
gouache on panel,
18 x 14 inches

Maia Stark,
Unspeakable Thing, 2020,
acrylic on panel,
24 x 18 inches

Maia Stark,
Hands Fully Mine, 2020,
acrylic on canvas,
48 x 36 inches

"Folk" is a word loaded with multiple meanings, conjuring up certain stereotypes and beliefs. At its core, it is about commonality, community, and ordinary people. When we say "folklore," "folk tradition," or "folk music," it means traditions and practices that were practiced by the general populace –as well as being niche and specific to geographic regions, it was created as a response by common people to their surroundings and perceptions of the world. It was highly individualistic to specific regions, and resisted constructs of the Empire (a political entity that thrives on assimilation and binary thinking). As a descriptor of traditional practices, "folk" is burdened with the connotation of whiteness. I argue that folk practice encompass the globe, not just European traditional practices and knowledge, but Asian, African, South American and Indigenous knowledge. The very word "folk" means people, and speaks to culture of common people that was made by common people. Removing whiteness from folk is essential to reinvigorating it as a method of negotiating the world. Folk practices speak to baseline rituals and beliefs among ordinary people; at their best, folk practices provide social cohesion, strengthen community and form an identity.

As countries were industrialized, evangelized or colonized, connections to traditional practices fell by the wayside. People began to participate in a dominant culture that was demystified, unenchanted, commercial and uniform – and this dominant culture was frequently disconnected to the people, history, and geography of regions it was imposed on. It's important not to view folk knowledge longingly and romantically - some folk beliefs and practices were harmful, misogynistic, racist, anti-Semitic or downright dangerous. Traditional beliefs are subject to the same human mistakes that any set of beliefs are. The artists whose works are included in the exhibition *Ritual & Lore* do not promote wholesale revival and blind acceptance of folk practices, instead they seek to engage with traditional knowledge and an enchanted way of thinking in a critical and ethical mode.

Each of the artists engage with traditional practices through the unique lens of their practice, family, heritage, and story. Some artists in *Ritual & Lore* engage with these practices in their day-to-day lives, while others consider their art to be the practice through which they think about folklore and folk methods.

RITUAL

Contemporary folk practices revive traditional knowledge with ethical considerations and mend rifts between generations. Rejecting the notion of the solitary artist/creator paradigm in contemporary art, Audie Murray (an artist of Métis ancestry) created her film *Enn Modeuz* by gathering her family to benefit from intergenerational knowledge. This short film explores Murray's process and practice, with stop motion animation of beading patterns used by both paternal and maternal great-great grandparents, (with her maternal side dating back to her great grandmother and her paternal side dating back to her great-great grandmother), the process of collecting quills, and Murray's intimate practice of traditional stitch tattoos being performed on her own thigh to situate herself within her familial narrative. Murray compares her film creation process to the process of gathering the materials for beading and quillwork, in which her family is enmeshed the creative process through the collection of the quills. Murray explains her film's formal aspects speak to intergenerational

creativity: she integrates both designs developed by her maternal and paternal great grandmothers alongside tattoo work that expresses her voice.

Materials are central to Murray's intensely process-based practice. The raw materials are encoded with familial and spiritual meanings, as is Murray's highly physical, labour intensive work with these materials. An example is a blanket dyed with inks created from an oak tree in the artist's yard. The piece's title, *Portal Rug*, provides a clue as to its meaning; coloured with the gall of these majestic trees, the blanket (metaphorically and magically) connects one colonial house to another. We cannot talk about ritual and lore without acknowledging the toll of oppressive colonialism on traditional practices: rituals and medicines were disdained, banned and criminalized. As we (both Indigenous, Metis, and Inuit as well as non-Indigenous Canadians) renegotiate national identity, retaking and re-forming tradition becomes an integral practice of power.

Ayla Dmyterko's practice also interrogates familial and cultural knowledge. Her film *Solastalgic Soliloquy* brings together cultural and nature-based aspects of folk tradition through the process of relearning traditional dance and the ritual of lighting candles within a forest. The two locations of her film - the Ukrainian Cultural Centre in Regina and the ancient Białowieża Forest in Poland- highlight the intense connection of culture and nature when it comes to folkloric practices. Dmyterko reflects upon her youth learning Ukrainian dance to mediate on both loss of tradition and cultural memory that live in the flesh - muscle memory and the collective unconscious. The idea of generational slippage (which explores loss of knowledge from generation to generation) is present in her film work as well as her fragmented embroidered piece. Both marvelling at the survival of knowledge and mourning its loss, Dmyterko reflects upon the fragile nature of generational knowledge.

As with all forms of nostalgia, there is a danger to viewing folk knowledge with romantic optimism. Part of the current revival in folk knowledge is contextualizing it with contemporary social and ethical mores: *Solastalgic Soliloquy* illustrates this tension through one particular scene. At one point, Dmyterko wears a wreath of flowers and lit candles on her head – a precarious and dangerous action, much akin to how the over-romanization of the past can cause us to lose sight of the harmful aspects of folk tradition.

Food is perhaps one of the most common yet easily lost forms of ritual. The act of preparing and eating food possesses seasonal and geographical knowledge particular to place and family. Recipes passed down from generation to generation can be lost through loss of language or if a single recipe card gets lost during a move. When learning of culinary traditions directly from an elder in the kitchen are disrupted by immigration, war, and emigration traditional foods and their meanings are lost. Such family-defining dishes can be recreated, but a particular family twist may be lost forever. Blair Fornwald and Brette Gabel use their interest in craft, the liminal, and ritual, both pseudo-scientific and quasi-magical, to create a Ouija board they used to contact their ancestors in an attempt to collect recipes from beyond the veil. Accompanying the board is a quilt bearing embroidered sigils, a graphic form of magic used to focus one's intent and call upon specific spirit while casting a spell.

Before the Ouija board became associated with the benign teen ritual of 20th century sleepover parties, it was a tool to quell the longing for loved ones lost to war and disease that drove the Spiritualist movement of the 1800s. Fornwald and Gabel redirect the wistful desire for connection implicit in the Ouji board to traditional food and family. Their cheeky innovation reinvests the commercialized and goofy Ouji board with the enchantment of folk tradition. By definition, folk culture is common culture and popular culture: using the tools and knowledge at hand (such a Ouija board) is a logical progression of ritual.

Ritual has long been the domain of the marginalized, a method by which the disempowered could exercise power over their own lives and health. Witchcraft has experienced a resurgence as a practice through which women with little to no power subvert dominant cultures and create alternate methods of knowledge. In her practice, Zoë Schneider draws upon this powerful heritage and takes the ritual element of spell to address the societal construct around diet culture.

In her work *Moon Pools*, Schneider explores cyclical dieting drawing an analogy to the waning and waxing of the moon and cyclical witchcraft rituals by creating the phases of the moon in cast concrete and filling them with significant oils, waters, herbs and crystals. As the sculpture sits, the absorbent nature of the concrete causes both the materials and moons to transform. Folk and traditional knowledge evolve in response to fears and inequities contemporary to a society; this still holds true. Schneider draws upon the moon's traditionally feminine power to undermine the controlling and pervasive weight loss industry. She notes that diet culture relies on women's subjugation: witchcraft offers power to women and always has, hence the persecution of witches. We can draw similar parallels to fat activists and artists' work as they take on the monolith that is the beauty and diet industry.

LORE

Marigold Santos fashions a self-narrative from the fabric of traditional lore in her ghostly ink drawings, harkening back to folk tale's roots and noting the mutability of oral traditions. Santo's work is other-worldly and liminal, balanced between Santos' identities as a Filipino-Canadian – the figures often contain multiple limbs and disembodied parts. These are representations of a fractured, monstrous self and the female boogeyman of Filipino folk tales: the Asuang. Santos transforms the Asuang into a personal emblem and representation of exploration of identity. The Asuang's unearthly abilities include self-severing and shape-shifting, in this sense the monster represents a radical freedom to form and controls its own plural appearance. In this body of work, Santos uses this figure to explore her multifaceted, plural identity in the context of her family's immigration to Canada from the Philippines in the late 1980s.

Santos connects to lore and refashions a folk monster to situate herself in a complicated and liminal space between two cultures. As folklore evolves from its use to explain the world, it becomes a method to locate ourselves within it instead.

Lore, as a tool to create a personal mythology, also features heavily in Maia Stark's work. Featuring brunette women in a series of unsettling scenes, she explores transformation, identity, and the many layers that go into crafting oneself both identity and situating oneself within contemporary society. Through folklore we can place ourselves within the world and make sense of the senseless. Stark has created a richly layered a form of lore that is informed by her personal history with her twin sister and through which she locates herself within her own body.

Stark incorporates emotionally healing aspects of folklore into her art practice. Stories that shape how our concept of self – mentally and physically. She comments in her statement that melancholy and self-reflection is "necessary to understand our place in a complicated world." For Stark, folklore is a tool to access those feelings. This desire to belong to a place and connect to a community underpin recent folklore revivals: traditional folk practices form communities and cement the individual's role within their society. In a world of colonialism and separation from nature, seasons, and our bodies, perhaps new ways of incorporating folk knowledge can bridge those severed connections.

In her book *Weave the Liminal*, author Laura Zakroff argues that ritual exists to be reinvented. All ritual and lore was new at some point and constantly evolving; therefore, we should never fear to update or create new rituals that suit new spaces, values and materials.

Tradition serves as a means to strengthen and connect communities, and change as those communities change. As Canadians begin to question entrenched modes of identity and tradition during a long-overdue reckoning around systemic racism, we face a crisis of identity. Stripping away harmful actions and beliefs wrapped espoused in objects, political rhetoric is painful and leaves many without their familiar and secure fallbacks. Tradition need not be toxic nor stuck in the past. As seen with each of the artists who grapple with identity, family, body and loss, we have an opportunity to redefine and restructure both ritual and lore to create a place in the world for ourselves and to reconnect with our pasts and our cultures in meaningful and constructive ways.

Jess Richter

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