



VIEW FROM THE
EDGE OF THE WORLD

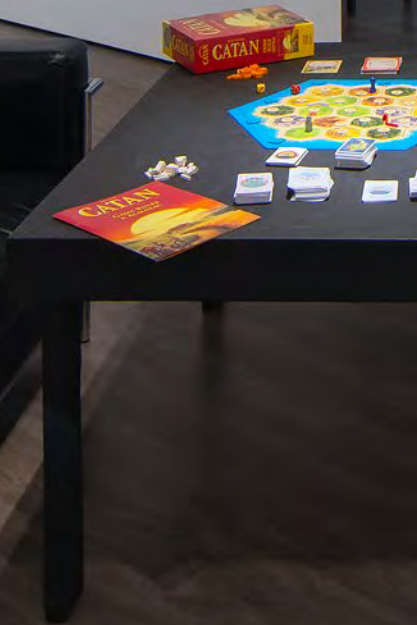
2023

ART GALLERY OF REGINA

View from the Edge of the World

CATHERINE JOA
GLADYS WOZNY SIEMENS
GOLBOO AMANI
MIKE KEEPNESS
SPEKWORK STUDIO
VERA SALTZMAN & SUE BLAND

ART GALLERY OF REGINA
AUGUST 18 - OCTOBER 22, 2023





*View from the Edge
of the World* installation view
PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY





*View from the Edge
of the World* installation view
PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY





*Big Heart, Big City, Don't Forget to
Smile YA JACKFISH, Be Happy,
Goodbye Flin Flon, Stick Man
(installation view), Catherine Joa,
acrylic on cradled wood panel,
36 x 84 inches (framed), 2023.*

PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY



Cut Bank (installation view),
Mike Keepness, oil on canvas board,
10.5 x 8.25 inches (framed), c. 2018.
Collection of Julia & Yolande Krueger.
PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY



Muted Light (installation view),
Mike Keepness, oil on canvas board,
14.25 x 11 inches (framed), c. 2018.
Collection of Julia & Yolande Krueger.
PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY

You may wonder why I titled this exhibition *View from the Edge of the World*. Part of the reason is the persistent stereotype of the Saskatchewan landscape as flat and featureless, dropping into nothingness at the horizon. Instead, the artworks from this exhibition reveal that this land is filled with lives, stories, overlooked beauty and miraculous transformation wrought by humans, animals, weather and time.

While many people imagine landscape to be an innocuous genre of art, how we represent the land reveals our attitudes and beliefs about the land. Do we view land as a commodity to be exploited or a living thing inseparable from our human lives?

View from the Edge of the World shares ways to re-think preconceptions of landscape and art. Artworks in conventional and unconventional media dispel stereotypes of the prairie experience.

Two small oil paintings by Mike Keepness (1981-2021) greet entrants to the exhibition and seem, at first, to meet expectations of landscape art. They are faithful and attentive renderings of real places. But these sites – chalky clay banks bordering muddy-coloured bodies of water, scant clumps of bushes and sparse stands of trees – are not traditionally picturesque.

In these works, Keepness depicts locations with significance for First Peoples – sites where life-giving water flows or those with spiritual importance. His approach to painting the landscape reveals a canny use of the language of European landscape painting to create ways for non-Indigenous and Indigenous people alike to value these places.

9

Keepness deliberately breaks with landscape painting tradition, which was historically rooted in the desires of wealthy European landowners who commissioned paintings of their large estates to show off the land that made up their wealth. Keepness invites viewers into a different relationship with the land. He doesn't subjugate the land beneath the skies in his paintings. No longer a thing to be divided and owned, the vast, immeasurable land takes up the entire canvas. Art historian Julia Krueger, who loaned the gallery two of her Keepness paintings for this exhibition, observed that the artist's compositions locate the viewer *within* the land. Neither the artist nor the viewer look down upon the land. Krueger further connects the paintings' unconventional points of view to Alison Calder's writing about the Post-Prairie, concluding that Keepness conveys an Indigenous worldview that humans are a part of the land.

This connection to the land is strengthened by Keepness' practice of painting *en plein air* (in nature). Studies such as *Cut Bank* and *Muted Light* were painted on-site, exemplifying Keepness' mission to capture the essence of the land and the historical sites of his Cree/Saulteaux heritage for future generations. Natural prairie is not just the subject but a literal inclusion in *Cut Bank*, as tiny bits of wild grasses are embedded in the paint.

The painting *Prayer Cloths* is a startling departure from Keepness' favoured subjects, exemplified by the lazily flowing river and softly humped hills furred with plantlife in *Formations*. Prayer cloths are a form of direct communication between humans, the land, and Creator. In this painting of slender birch trees, three are encircled with lengths of red, yellow and blue cotton fabric; Keepness invites us into this intimate communion. Unlike a Christian notion of prayer as asking for something, prayer cloths are bundles containing offerings to the land in thanks for the gifts the people have received. Keepness' acknowledgment of the land as living and sentient is ultimately a rejection of capitalist ideas that objectify and commodify the land.



Prayer Cloths, Mike Keepness,
oil on canvas, 25 x 31 inches (framed), 2020.
Collection of SK-Arts.

PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY



11

Formations, Mike Keepness,
oil on canvas, 32 x 42 inches (framed), 2016.
Collection of SK-Arts.

PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY

Like Keepness, Catherine Joa approaches the landscape through her lived experience. She renders the vistas that mark her daily commute without romanticism. Sublimely jagged outcrops of graffiti-tagged rocks or scrubby groves of jackpine bisected by a ribbon of highway or fringed with dirty slush are her subjects, not the mythical prairie of the popular imagination.

Rather than artfully excluding the marks of humans, such as pavement and graffiti, Joa acknowledges that people have always shaped the landscape and written their presence on it. Her paintings celebrate the importance of roads and communication networks for rurally-living people. These marvellous contemporary technologies deserve to be admired alongside the timeless magnificence of rock formations and forests.

12

Likewise, by giving space to frivolous, semi-anonymous graffiti messages, Joa animates these landscapes with traces of the people who live on these lands.

Unlike the stereotype of Saskatchewan as a flat horizontal plane devoid of geological landforms and people, Joa's seven-foot tall vertical canvases, roughly mirroring the dimensions of a human, acknowledge our landscape as an ideological and literal construction; whether wheat fields or forests, nature without humans is unnatural.

Joa and Keepness answer our collective need, as immigrants, settlers, or Indigenous individuals, for images of this place that help us understand, respect, and treasure this land.

Big City and Don't Forget to Smile
YA JACKFISH (installation view), Catherine Joa,
acrylic on cradled wood panel,
36 x 84 inches (framed), 2023.

PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY





The Puzzle That Therefore I Am,
Gladys Wozny Siemens,
direct plaster cast on wood armature,
copper powder and pigments in
acrylic medium, acrylic paint,
37.75 x 38 x 3.75 inches, 2022.

*Bird strike from
Frenchman Valley*,
Gladys Wozny Siemens,
direct plaster cast,
19 x 20 x 2.25 inches, 2007.

A Desiccation,
Gladys Wozny Siemens,
plaster cast on wood armatures,
24.25 x 24.25 x 2.25 inches, 2012.





15

The Puzzle That Therefore I Am (detail),
Gladys Wozny Siemens,
direct plaster cast on wood armature,
copper powder and pigments in
acrylic medium, acrylic paint,
37.75 x 38 x 3.75 inches, 2022.

PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY



Desiccation II, Gladys Wozny Siemens,
direct plaster cast on wood armature/
frame, 30 x 20 x 2.5 inches, 2015.



Bird strike with stick from Frenchman Valley,
Gladys Wozny Siemens, direct plaster cast,
20 x 20 x 2.5 inches, 2007.



17

Shore Triptych, Gladys Wozny Siemens,
direct plaster casts on wood armatures, salvaged wood frames,
tinted plaster, sand, 24.25 x 24 x 4 inches (left panel), 32 x 24 x 4 inches
(middle panel), 24.5 x 24 x 4 inches (right panel), 2022.

PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY



Shore Triptych (detail), Gladys Wozny Siemens,
direct plaster casts on wood armatures, salvaged wood frames,
tinted plaster, sand, 24.25 x 24 x 4 inches (left panel), 32 x 24 x 4
inches (middle panel), 24.5 x 24 x 4 inches (right panel), 2022.

PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY

When I bring together artworks by different artists in an exhibition, I anticipate new meanings and connections created by proximity. The notion of staging a conversation guided me to position Gladys Wozny Siemens' black and copper-hued plaster cast titled *The Puzzle That Therefore I Am* next to Joa's painting of chestnut rock formations and dark tarmac. Not only are the bronzed tones of these works in sympathy, but the highways in Joa's paintings suggest an interpretation of the vertical and horizontal lines in Wozny Siemens' work as grid roads, property lines or borders. Through the linear language of cartography, Wozny Siemens' ragged-edged, plaster plot of earth becomes a symbolic depiction of place.

Wozny Siemens' method of depicting the land of Southwestern Saskatchewan is inventively literal. She coats the surface of a dried riverbed with wet plaster that dries to form a cast that captures and inverts impressions left in the soil. The artists' focus on the land beneath our feet reveals the unnoticed character of a land shaped by wildlife and the weather. Through her casts, we can examine the wonder of cracks crisscrossing the parched mud, animal tracks, bits of dried grass, shells and even sneaker treads.

Wozny Siemens gives viewers a clue to the mysterious rippled marks captured in a pair of free-standing plaster slabs with her titles: *Birdstrike from Frenchman Valley* and *Birdstrike with Stick from Frenchman Valley*. A "birdstrike" is the artist's term for a hunting bird's wing cleaving the riverbed silt as it snatches up its prey. These free-standing plaster tablets could easily be mistaken for fossils; the artist's method replaces minerals that calcify over millennia with gypsum that sets in minutes to memorialize a moment unfolding in a split second.

Unlike Wozny Siemens' other plaster molds of fissured river mud, *A Desiccation* and *Desiccation II* are devoid of the traces of a bustling ecosystem. Desiccation is the total removal of moisture, a kind of mummification. These casts of the chapped soil document this extreme drying, which could signify disappearing water due to climate change or a regular drying cycle on the bald prairie.

19

You may notice the letters T-E-X-T in the lower right corner of *Desiccation II*, where one would expect to find the artist's signature. Functioning as placeholder text, these letters reveal Wozny Siemens' hesitancy to push aside the work of nature and claim sole authorship for herself.

Both *A Desiccation* and *Desiccation II* demonstrate an understanding of the frame, which deconstructionists theorized as simultaneously integral and superfluous to a work of art. The artist casts her frames in plaster, the same as the direct casts she lifts from dried riverbed surfaces. Her frames are both the artwork and a supplement to the artwork. Wozny Siemens employs another strategy from New French Theory by decorating the frame of *A Desiccation* with redacted or struck-through letters. This crossed-out technique, known as "*sous rature*" or "under erasure," was developed by philosopher Martin Heidegger and widely applied by Jacques Derrida to indicate a word considered inadequate but to which language offers no better alternative. Perhaps we can all identify with the inadequacy of words and images when considering the sunbaked remains of a river.

Wozny Siemens' *Shore Triptych* is significant for the insights it provides into the artist's past as an abstract expressionist painter. Her admiration for the power of gesture to communicate the inarticulable and unknowable is evident. Large, webbed beaver prints trace a path across the three panels of the work, punctuated by an energetic arc of plaster that embellishes a solitary paw print in the final panel.

Studded with tiny shells, *Shore Triptych* presents an opportunity to think beyond stereotypes: pawprints much larger than many would imagine a beaver to have and an unexpectedly rich array of aquatic life on the prairies. This landscape, while constantly being remade by humans, is also altered by climate and terraforming rodents.

Collaborators Sue Bland, a writer and parks worker, and photographer Vera Saltzman attend to uncelebrated experiences of the land. Their expansive installation *Where will the frogs sing?* reflects on the disappearing characteristics of our landscape. Along with family farms, the artists record the loss of windbreaks, small wetlands, and remnants of untilled grasslands demolished and cultivated as farms grow and industrialize. Observing the pervasive image of Saskatchewan as a single, cultivated field, Bland and Saltzman state, “We imagine the land[scape] was always like this.”

The nearly overwhelming mass of images and artifacts assembled by the artists mimic the formidable scope of the problem and demonstrate the depth of the artists’ research. Among them is a memorable photograph, seen on the cover of this publication, by Saltzman capturing large machinery stripping the land of bush that provided shelter and habitat for innumerable species.

Bland has shrunk this concern of changing land use to fit into a suitcase. Painted from aerial photographs taken in 1940 and the current day, *Land In A Box* is displayed with the case open on a low pedestal, an invitation to turn these painted blocks over, to remix and assemble fallow fields, sloughs, varied plantings and solid fields of yellow canola.

Bits of bone, rusted scraps of farm machinery, thorny branches, barbed wire, feathers and bird nests all find a place among the constellation of photographic and watercolour images stretching across two gallery walls. Another disquieting vision of the landscape documented by Saltzman is encircled by a gilt frame and placed high on the wall. A dark strip of gravel road narrows toward the horizon. A dense fog erases landmarks and meets the equally featureless shoulders of the road, blanketed in white snow. Unmoored from the land it provides access to, this road seems to lead us to the edge of the world.

20

The same road to nowhere can also be seen through holes in a time-worn cloth stretched across the corner of the gallery. Bland has cut and printed bison-shaped outlines on the canvas, adding to the oil stains and rips left by generations who used this work cloth. More than an object, this piece of canvas became a conduit for the artists to reconnect to the spirit of what has been lost by laying the cloth on the land in various places. A photo album documenting this moving, ritualized performance is also housed within their installation.

Absence and nothingness are potent experiences for prairie people, not just when considering the loss of precious biodiversity. A large, black and white photograph shows a person, mitten-clad hands raised in an ambiguous gesture of agonized cry or embrace of the world, standing in a snowy field. Saltzman’s decisions to print the picture on thin paper and hang it with magnets are purposefully unprecious and approachable. Should the magical force of the magnets flag, the print would drift to the ground like another snowflake.

Central to *Where will the frogs sing?* is a kitchen table that serves as a locus for discussions of tradition, loss, and the food system. The artists have literally and figuratively set the table for sympathetic and challenging conversations, returning to the gallery at irregular intervals to serve up things to ponder in person or penned on the plates at each place.

Like Wozny Siemens, Bland and Saltzman know the value of looking at the ground. They’ve illustrated the circular linoleum mat beneath their table with photographs of lichen, flowers, grasses, cacti, animal tracks, animal droppings, and snow to depict the four seasons of Qu’Appelle Valley. I can’t help but see the parallels between the artists’ carpet, divided into four seasons, and the four-part garden depicted in what used to be called an “oriental rug.” Philosopher Michel Foucault proposed that Persian carpet designs evolved from a desire of nomadic peoples to create a portable version of the *charar bagh* or four-part garden. However, Bland and Saltzman’s carpet brings the wilderness rather than sacred, cultivated plantings into the domestic environment.



Where will the frogs sing? (detail),
Vera Saltzman & Sue Bland,
mixed media installation,
variable dimensions, 2023.

PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY





Where will the frogs sing?,
Vera Saltzman & Sue Bland, mixed media
installation, variable dimensions, 2023.

PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY



wetland across the road

June '22

s. Blund



Dugout in Field

Sept 22



Shelter belt



Road Abundance

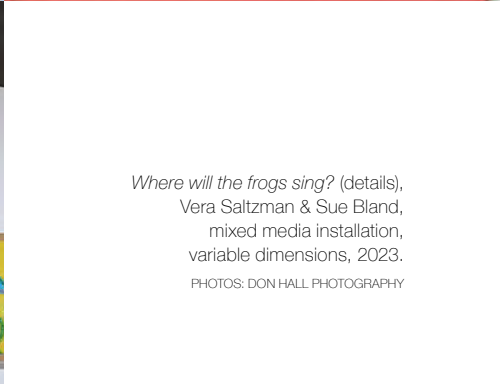
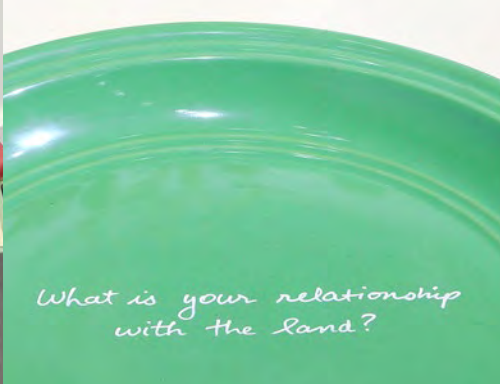
s. Blund



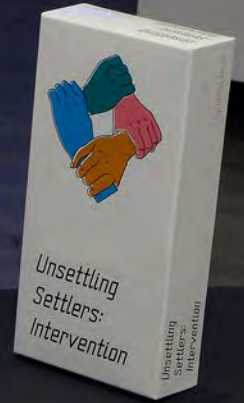
Open bluffs, early Spring

May 2023





Where will the frogs sing? (details),
Vera Saltzman & Sue Bland,
mixed media installation,
variable dimensions, 2023.
PHOTOS: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY



Unsettling Settlers: Intervention, Golboo Amani, Expansion Pack and Artist Multiple, variable dimensions, 2017.

PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY

When we think of wilderness and our relationships with land, the settlement of Canada by Europeans is not far from those thoughts. *Unsettling Settlers: Intervention* is an expansion pack created by artist Golboo Amani for the popular board game *Settlers of Catan*. *Settlers of Catan* welcomes fan-created expansion packs like Amani's, which depend upon the original game mechanics and pieces. Amani, meanwhile, upends *Settlers of Catan*'s ingrained narratives of conquest and Colonial attitudes toward land and people.

Both the "base game" and the expansion pack are spread across a table in the gallery in an invitation to play. Examining the *Settlers of Catan* board and game pieces offers insights into how the game frames the landscape, already sliced into plots yielding commodities. The gameboard is a hexagon divided into smaller hexagons of five different terrain types, each tied to a resource to be collected by the player: bricks, lumber, ore, grain, and wool. A light-coloured token called "the robber" halts resource production on any terrain hexagon it occupies. The tiny scale and bright colours of wooden tokens representing settlements (little houses) and roads (coloured rods) belie their earthshattering importance.

Stacks of cards drive the gameplay. The femme aesthetics of Amani's expansion pack – pastel graphics and bold, simple text on an austere white background – contrast with the illustration-filled, sepia-hued cards of the "base game." The openness of Amani's design acts as a visual analogy for the openmindedness with which one should approach the game.

On October 6, thirty people gathered at the Art Gallery of Regina to learn and play *Unsettling Settlers: Intervention*, guided by Amani and three local artists. Presented in partnership with Common Weal Community Arts and board game store Comic Readers, the gameplay session filled an afternoon with joyful conversation and laughter. Rarely has confronting biases and replacing hoarding and exploitation with negotiation and collaboration been so enjoyable.

27

Participants could choose to play as settlers, following the rules of the original game, or as a team of allies. However, Amani's expansion pack doesn't pit settlers against allies; all players will lose unless they work together by sharing resources and forming treaties. One group of players pursued an outcome that Amani, who has been facilitating *Unsettling Settlers: Intervention* gameplay events since 2017, has never seen before. The settlers and allies formed a collective and redefined the game's objective as one of communal benefit.

Unsettling Settlers: Intervention goes beyond exposing the fault in *Settlers of Catan*'s celebration of pushing people off of their land and stripping it of resources to turn into commodities. It provides rare opportunities to understand and discuss the mechanisms behind treaties and direct action strategies such as roadblocks. It allows players to see parallels between situations enacted in the game, such as dividing the land through the construction of roads, and the history of nation-building in Canada through projects like a coast-to-coast railroad.

The profound power of *Unsettling Settlers: Intervention* is its ability to make confronting biases, conflict over land, struggle for survival, and reinventing the rules of society fun.

While a board game may be an unexpected medium for artwork about the land, SpekWork Studio's machine-made landscapes mount a different kind of challenge on assumptions about art, creativity, and the natural world.

GAN of Living Skies by SpekWork Studio (Cat Bluemke and Jonathan Carroll) is a startlingly immaterial reflection on the material reality of the land. Comprised of a video projection and a wagon containing a homemade computer powered by solar energy, their work appears austere at first.

A series of highly pixelated landscapes, all bisected by a horizontal divide between land and sky, turn one gallery wall into a picture window. A generative antagonistic network or GAN, a type of machine learning, generated this video based on a dataset of genuine Saskatchewan landscapes. Although a computer scientist might view the pixelated images as excessively noisy, something to be corrected, the artists interpret this lack of crispness as equivalent to the expressive brushwork of impressionist painters.

SpekWork Studio, who often create video game artworks, dubbed the video component of their work *GAN of Living Skybox*, referencing how a videogame designer creates a sky that appears behind or above all the objects in a video game scene. Textures mapped to a skybox, the inside faces of a cube, appear to surround video game players by 360 degrees. In their video, pixelated landscapes scintillate in a space that looks like the interior of a slowly spinning cube, a digital world built of pixels.

Their solar-powered wagon, *waGAN*, is a sculptural object and a tool to create artwork. Equipped with a solar panel and rugged orange wheels, it holds a computer, webcam, and other GAN electronics, which can then be wheeled into the parklands surrounding the Art Gallery of Regina to observe the natural world and generate ersatz landscapes. While many have been concerned about the huge amounts of energy used by AI, SpekWork Studio's solar-powered art-making machine addresses environmental concerns while problematizing our ideas of authenticity. Does a solar-powered device create landscapes any less real or natural than landscapes that are grown by the sun or revealed to our eyes through the sun's rays?

In the not-so-distant past, landscape paintings were crafted as symbols of national identity used to unify a population. SpekWork Studio has transformed Saskatchewan from the Land of Living Skies into the *GAN of Living Skies*. Their playful skewering of a provincial point of pride questions our notions of natural versus artificial and place-based identity in the digital age.

As someone born and raised within the sheltering mountain peaks of western Canada, the landscape of Saskatchewan used to worry me. What would stop me, I wondered, from sliding off the edge of the world where golden fields lay flat under the blue dome of the sky? It is this freefall into the unknown, or at least the unexamined and rarely dreamed of, that is the true magic of the land and the artists who respond to it. In outlandishly unique media, such as board games, kitchen table conversations, plaster casts and solar-powered art-making machines, artists Mike Keepness, Catherine Joa, Gladys Wozny Siemens, Vera Saltzman & Sue Bland, and SpekWork Studio invite us to reinvent our thinking about land and art.

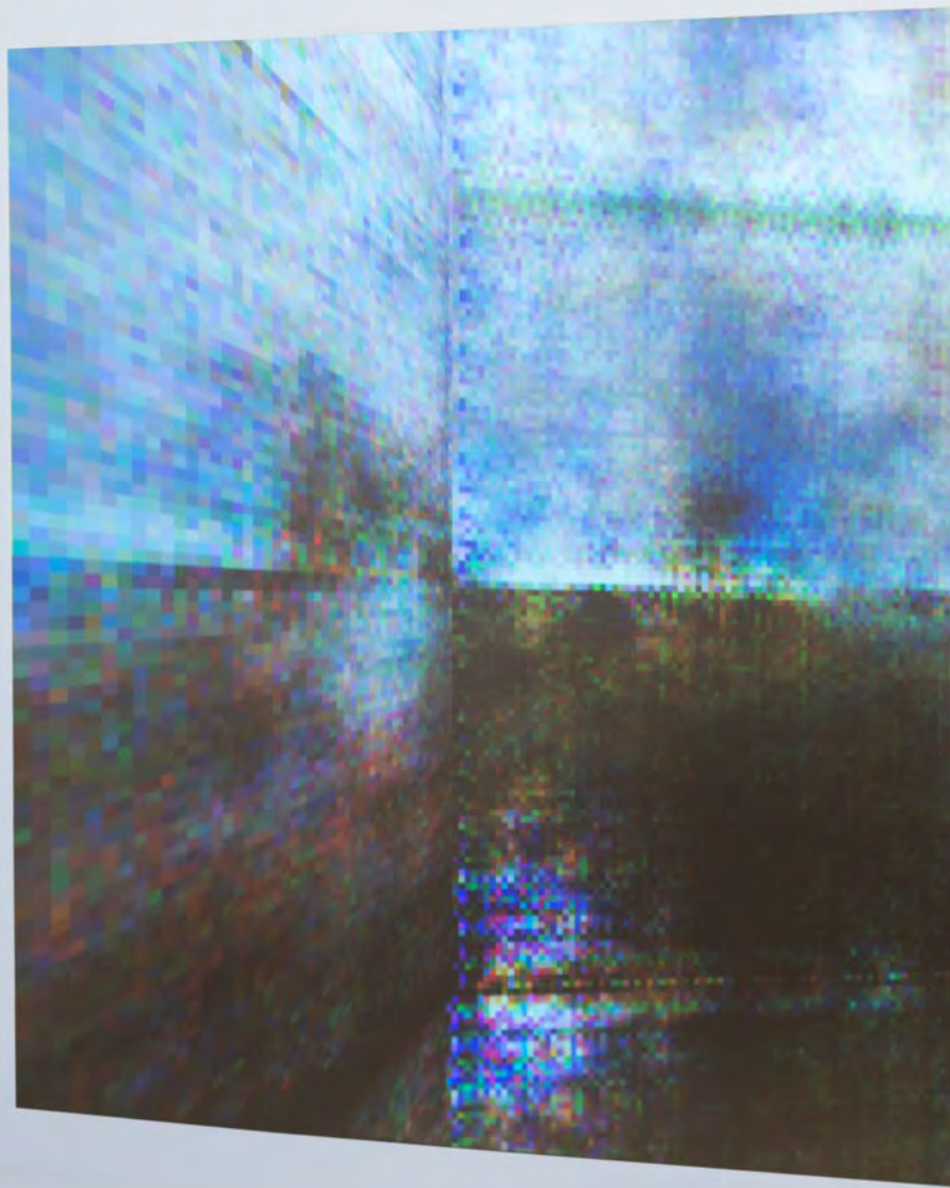
The artists in this exhibition take us to the edge of the known field of landscape art and inspire us to venture beyond stereotypes, histories, and commerce. Their works invite us to craft harmonious new ways to live, make images and acknowledge that people are an integral part of the land.

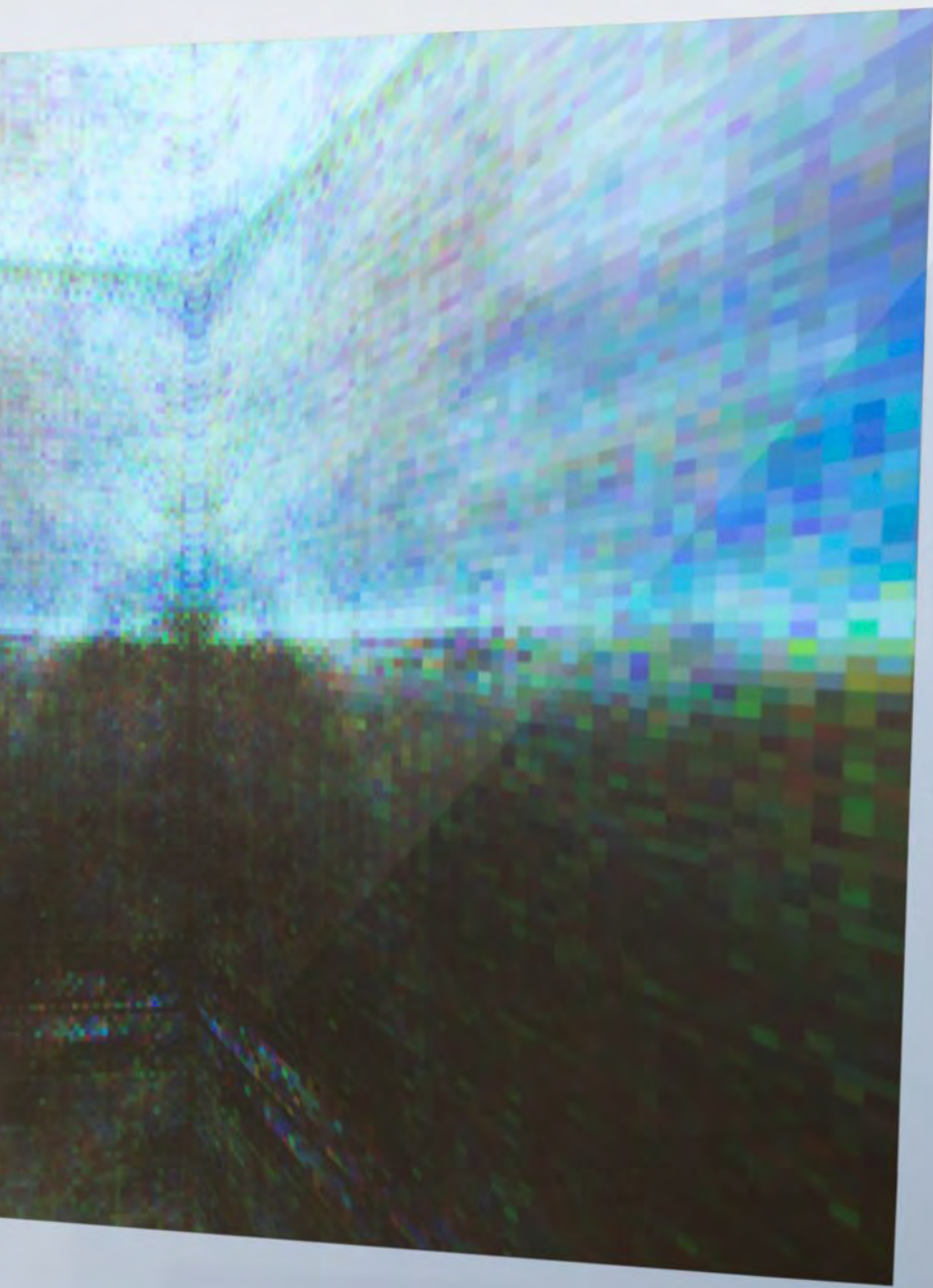
Sandee Moore



GAN of Living Skies, SpekWork Studio
(Cat Bluemke & Jonathan Carroll), solar panels, lasercut
wood, tires, cart, generative AI, video projection,
variable dimensions, 2021–23. Documentation of
outdoor activation at Art Gallery of Regina.

PHOTO: SPEKWORK STUDIO





GAN of Living Skies, SpekWork Studio
(Cat Bluemke & Jonathan Carroll),
solar panels, lasercut wood, tires,
cart, generative AI, video projection,
variable dimensions, 2021–23.
Installation view.

PHOTO: DON HALL PHOTOGRAPHY

View from the Edge of the World

Catherine Joa, Gladys Wozny Siemens, Golboo Amani,
Mike Keepness, SpekWork Studio, Vera Saltzman & Sue Bland

August 18 – October 22, 2023

Curator, Sandee Moore

Published by Art Gallery of Regina Inc.

© Art Gallery of Regina Inc.

ISBN # 978-1-927422-30-4

Art Gallery of Regina
2420 Elphinstone Street
P.O. Box 1790
Regina, Saskatchewan
Canada S4P 3C8
www.artgalleryofregina.ca

Director: Robin Lynch

Curator: Sandee Moore

Essay: Sandee Moore

Design: Brent Pylot, Epic Art + Design

Cover Image: *Sad Moon Rising* (detail of *Where will the frogs sing?*), Vera Saltzman, digitally altered photograph, 2023.

Back Cover Image: *GAN of Living Skies*, SpekWork Studio (Cat Bluemke & Jonathan Carroll), solar panels, lasercut wood, tires, cart, generative AI, video projection, variable dimensions, 2021–23. Documentation of outdoor activation at Art Gallery of Regina. Photograph by SpekWork Studio.

Photographs: Don Hall Photography, unless otherwise noted

32

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.

Catherine Joa, Vera Saltzman and Sue Bland, Gladys Wozny Siemens and SpekWork Studio recognize the generous support of SK-Arts who funded the production and dissemination of their work for this exhibition.

Thank you to SK-Arts and Julia & Yolande Kreuger for loaning artworks to the Art Gallery of Regina for this exhibition. We are grateful to Common Weal Community Arts, Comic Readers, Holophon Audio Arts, Art for Lunch at the University of Regina and the Neil Balkwill Civic Arts Centre for supporting our Culture Days activities through their partnership and SaskCulture whose Culture Days funding enabled us to offer exiting ways for the public to connect with *View from the Edge of the World*. We also thank Casino Regina for their funding of our exhibition reception.

We appreciate the valuable support of our exhibition sponsor, TD Asset Management.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada

Exhibition
Sponsor



**TD Asset
Management**



AGR

Engaging.
Contemporary.
Art.