

# HEATHER CLINE

## Populating Veduta- Contemporary Cityscapes

October 20 - November 21, 2010



Art Gallery of Regina



"The Exit (birds-eye view at the Cathedral)", 10' x 10', Acrylic/Digital Transfer/Canvas, 2010

Cover:  
"Love through barking dog," detail, 10' x 5', Acrylic/Digital Transfer/Canvas, 2010

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### ART GALLERY OF REGINA

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### Populating Veduta- Contemporary Cityscapes

I have lived in Regina for at least twenty years and throughout that whole period of time the 'bohemian' Cathedral area has been labeled a 'transition' neighbourhood. This label could be understood as meaning at least two things: first, that this locality is an area that is undergoing some sort of transformation in its physical state - some sort of renovation or conversion; or second, that this locality is a kind of inter-zone or passage zone that sits somewhere between two other neighbourhoods that boundary it. But a third meaning also comes to mind that has something to do with transformation: that this neighbourhood is undergoing a change over time from what it was in the past to what it is now in the present.

All three readings (and more) are possible and even necessary when considering **Heather Cline's** installation of new paintings entitled **Populating Veduta: Contemporary Cityscapes**.

An Italian word that translates as "view", veduta specifically refers to historical 'view painting' - to luxurious postcard-style paintings of urban vistas in which the population, if they are represented at all, are secondary considerations to the grand sweep of the city's streets, buildings and boulevards. Cline opposes the distanced 'big view' for the more intimate small view in the paintings in this exhibition, focusing her attention instead on this neighbourhood's primary commercial thoroughfare - a street of a few short blocks where, aside from the occasional chain store, we find unique independently-owned commercial enterprises (from small bookstores to bistros to art galleries).

While perhaps remarkable within the city of Regina, this thoroughfare by any international standards, is remarkable precisely because it is unremarkable. Cline foregrounds this largely ignored neighborhood and its residents in her paintings, giving visibility to its places and people who go about their small daily rituals. With such a localized view, it would certainly be possible (and in some ways correct) to discuss this work in terms of 'community' and of shared experiences and values: a couple walks a dog, people leave Sunday Mass, hipsters go shopping and so on.

Yet Cline's images refuse the single point of view of this neighbourhood and indeed provide us with multiple visual points of view in her paintings. Indeed turning away depictions of 'frozen in time' moments - of single time frame images - she refuses the tradition of history painting. Instead she opts for layered almost montage images which demands a layered reading of this place. Here we find multiple small dramas played out at different times fused into a kind of ghostly whole where people and buildings seem less embodied elements than traces. Lacking a defined or fixed visual or narrative scheme, Cline is clearly not so much painting this place as it is seen or even painting a shifting panoply of people, things and events occurring in this place, as she is painting an 'idea' of this place.

But whose idea of place is this exactly - whose experiences, narratives and belief systems are shaping her own reading of this place and, more importantly, our shared idea of 'Cathedral'?

The cohabitation of the Holy Rosary Cathedral alongside, let's say, a new sushi restaurant suggests that the Cathedral neighbourhood is a dynamic one that accommodates rather than resists the commingling of the past with the present: some seek out the suburbs in the

same way others seek out inner-city neighbourhoods such as this. Indeed, buried within the painted surfaces here alongside images of the present - as if buried within memory - we find actual snippets of newspaper articles from decades ago, printed matter from the City of Regina archives and so on. This is not Cline's respectful gesture aimed at acknowledging the history of this neighbourhood nor a mere 'pointing to' the past but a way of revealing the compound nature of history itself.

Cline understands history to be less fixed than flexible, less singular than plural. Her work here challenges the official record - challenges the larger social narratives about Regina that already socially codes and governs the way we think about this neighbourhood and, through that, this city itself. This tumble of images must be read as a challenge to the fixing of social continuity and flow - to the dominance of one version of the past and present that we tell ourselves is 'our history'.

Prompted to ask these kinds of questions - about how we narrate ourselves culturally - as a result of a visit she made to the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, this installation gently embeds her resistance to a monovalent history preferring instead a version of time and place that is multivalent: she privileges singular unique stories over monolithic ones. Cline over-writes here the preferred history of this neighbourhood, this city, this province, this country with something that is more contrary, individual and personal. To do this she strategically interviewed a wide range of residents who live in this neighbourhood and who voluntarily spoke to her about their feelings for this neighbourhood and their experiences of it. Less informal than we might think given her ideological position, they were instead asked formal questions in a bureaucratic manner as if they were being interviewed for citizenship by a government official. It is these individuals who are seen telling their stories - both poignant and humorous - in the videos displayed here.

In the act of social conversation - of conversation that knowingly speaks to the civic - these interviewees reveal something about this place that had prior to this been submerged beneath official history. Their stories, memories and details - expressed and heard here in the social space of the gallery - reveal an alternate 'truth' about this place: in a way, here, the diary opposes the archive. Working with the same kinds of museum display that she encountered in Ottawa (and which are found throughout the world in all kinds of museums, from the historical to the anthropological), Cline's explanatory panels not only reveal the past as it has been authoritatively written by government officials and academics over time but juxtaposes that with something more ambient and indefinite: in these videos and on these text panels, we find one individual's point of view colliding with another's. Whose truth is truth?

As interviewer, photographer and videographer, Cline's direct engagement with her 'research subjects' has both anthropological and performative elements and it is through both this gathering of multiple lived memories and then collaging them together on the canvas that Cline herself - here an artist-citizen - reflects upon the dialectical problem - the clash - of public and private histories. Indeed, it is through the act of collage that she permits herself to consider, to write and to re-write her thoughts regarding truth: collage as a process (uncovering, layering, overwriting, choosing, discarding) is based in instability. Perhaps we could even consider the process of collage to metaphorically mimic other kinds of human and social process from the nature of personal memory and even to the flux and flow of neighbourhoods as people come and go.

Cline's work here inquires through art into our knowledge about ourselves and the meanings we attach to that knowledge. She does not assert a version of reality that claims the entirety of social relations, opting instead for a collectivity of definitions that remain open to constant question and reconfiguration. At the same time - and through art - she inquires into the social construction of art itself: how does our officially constituted social history ("O Canada!) feed into and colour the making of art? On the flip side, how does art (like that seen in the War Museum) play a role in constituting our history?

Cline's exhibition acknowledges that, in the end, as much as we write history, history writes us. Any discord between the two has something to do with how we define history and what aspects of it we choose to remember, value and promote. As a new kind of guidebook to this locale in the present, the work here offers an open-ended itinerary rather than the packaged tour.

Jack Anderson, 2010



"The Musicians"; detail, 5' x 10', Acrylic/Digital Transfer/Canvas, 2010