



34 ART ON DEMAND

AOD 3.4 curated by KATHERINE SEARLE BFA student UFV

Jessica Peatman and Kristin Voth examine what it means to be a child in an overwhelming world. Although each artist portrays an alternative perspective of childhood experience, both artists speak to those times during childhood when reality overrules imagination and fantasy; when pieces of childhood are left behind, and we are forced to move forward.

Jessica Peatman's work reflects the loneliness, fear, and uncertainty of childhood, and explores the tension between naivety and maturity. The works included in this exhibition, which come from a series entitled *Reconstructed Recollections*, refer to the subjectivity of memory as conveyed through the process of photo-etching. Using photosensitive materials, this process allows imagery to be etched onto a metal plate for use as print matrix. The printed images, like memories, are reproduced time and again but with each revisiting lose sharpness and accuracy. Peatman's prints evoke her own experience in the foster care system, both as a child in care and as part of a family that fostered young children, and suggest that, though concepts of home may differ from child to child, the desire for a sense of safety and belonging is a common experience for all children.

Peatman's graphite drawings resemble children's book illustrations. Her scenes are populated by cartoonish kids, with large exaggerated eyes, simplified features, and a flatness of form. While this aesthetic is usually associated with the approachability of children's literature, Peatman's prints reflect the isolation and uncertainty of the foster experience. For example, *About Yourself* depicts a young boy in a classroom who looks out toward the viewer, his expression neutral. He is surrounded by a group of peers whose faces have been replaced with blank circles. Each of the figures wears a nametag bearing a clearly written first name. The main figure's nametag, however, is blank. He is uniquely isolated in his peer group, plainly visible but otherwise unknown, unnamed,

and alone. In *With Scarecrow*, the figure of a young girl crouches beside a scarecrow as though seeking friendship or protection from her inanimate companion. Her body language is closed, knees pulled to her chest, eyes downcast. It is an image of deep loneliness. Home is Peatman's only work in this exhibition that is devoid of human figures. A childlike drawing of a house is superimposed over the photo-etched image of a suburban bungalow. The drawn representation is both idyllic and unstable, encapsulating the tension between the reality and the idealized version of home in the experience of childhood.

In her work, Kristin Voth uses moments taken from photographs of her childhood. Using a palette of pastels and greys, her paintings bear a resemblance to old photographs. Works in this exhibition come from a series entitled *We Were Like Balloons*, and examine the power of photography to complicate memory. For example, old family photographs can eventually become stand-ins for authentic, often idealized, memories. Voth reverses this notion in her paintings, intimating that photography can also bear witness to moments of dissonance, when idyllic memories are supplanted with the awkward, painful realities of being young.

Voth depicts children in situations that would normally be considered pleasant: riding bikes, attending birthday parties, and trips to the swimming pool. However, in these scenes, the children's expressions deny the simplicity and joy that we might expect to find. Voth's handling of paint is unfettered and suggestive, combining elements to create a mood rather than simply describing a scenario. In *Pool Party*, a lone female figure in a pale pink bathing suits stands at the edge of a swimming pool. Though loosely rendered, the figure's tight shoulders and clenched fists suggest that her poolside experience is anything but pleasant. Behind her, a smeared "no diving" sign stands out against

the hazy black wall. Thinly-drawn, pastel balloons appear on either side of the girl, insubstantial objects resembling blackboard scrawl transposed onto the surface of the image; imagined flickers of hope in a desolate world. In *Freedom is a Thin String*, Voth looks at both the freedom and constraints found in our relationships with those we love. On the right-hand side of the diptych, a child sits on her pink tricycle holding a large bouquet of multicoloured balloons. A thin white string connects the toddler to an older male figure who holds it taut in the opposite panel. This line of connection, representing the familial tie between father and daughter, is nevertheless broken by the physical reality of the split canvas.

Jessica Peatman and Kristin Voth portray aspects of childhood quickly forgotten by adults whose domains of agency and influence make it easy to disregard past vulnerabilities. Using photography-based practices to recall the events and emotions of childhood, these artists conjure the hardships of our formative years, awakening youthful discomfort while ensuring that it is held at arm's length, a safe distance from which to say "I remember when..."

ARTISTS

JESSICA PEATMAN BFA UFV

Jessica Peatman grew up in Langley and completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Arts in June 2017 at the University of the Fraser Valley. She is currently undergoing a self-directed study in printmaking to further advance her skills in the medium. In her artwork she embraces childhood sensibilities to express loneliness, fear, and uncertainty. Her work reflects moments of understanding that transition from innocence and naivety to skepticism.

KRISTIN VOTH MA REGENT COLLEGE

Kristin Voth is a Vancouver-based mixed-media artist who grew up in Abbotsford. She is drawn to small things often overlooked, like moss growing from the cracks in the sidewalk or the familiar faces in family photo albums. Some themes addressed in her artwork include recollection, alienation, and promise. Kristin's work is deeply informed by her study of English literature and theology. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English from Trinity Western University and a Master of Arts in theology and the arts from Regent College. In addition to her personal practice, she collaborates with the Open Book Art Collective, an art-collective/book-club hybrid that seeks to create dialogue between literature and art objects.

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exhibition runs
NOVEMBER 16 – DECEMBER 31, 2017

opening reception
NOVEMBER 16, 2017 | 6:30PM
at The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford

thereach
Gallery Museum
Abbotsford



The Reach Gallery Museum | 32388 Veterans Way, Abbotsford, BC
thereach.ca/emerge

Image Credit: Top: Kristin Voth, *Pool Party*, 2016, Acrylic and mixed medium on wood panel, 24"x30"

Bottom: Jessica Peatman, *I'm not afraid of the dark, the dark is afraid of me*, 2017, Photo etching on Stonehenge paper, 12"x16"