



# Trajectories:

## New Landscapes in Glass

Fig. 1, Cheryl Willson-Smith, *Promises and Lies: Keeping Score*, 2015  
Image courtesy of the artist

The group exhibition *Trajectories*, at the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, Waterloo ON, January 14 - March 18, 2018, featured recent works by seven artists who won the RBC Award for Glass between 2008 and 2016.

These artists, in addition to sharing the distinction of winning the Award, also share a commitment to the exploration of glass as an experimental and seductive medium. While some make use of traditional glass manipulation techniques – including casting, blowing, and sandblasting – others incorporate investigation of 3D printing and digital manufacturing methods into their practice.

*Trajectories* affirmed the gallery's commitment to showcasing the strength and diversity of glass artwork in Canada. Several of the artists exhibited works that directly address the Canadian landscape, both its beauty and its vulnerability. In these reflections, I will focus on these artists.

Cheryl Wilson-Smith works from her studio in Red Lake, "on the granite and gold of the Canadian Shield and surrounded by Boreal Forest" in the far north of Ontario. Wilson-Smith's signature style involves working with multiple layers of frit glass that are fused together through a labour-intensive process. This layering references natural phenomena

such as the formation of sedimentary rock or ice. Through her work, viewers are confronted with the starkness of the northern landscape, as well as the isolation inherent in living and working here.

With calculated precision yet poetic sensibility, Wilson-Smith also integrates other sculptural materials in her artwork. Dramatically, in a work called *Promises & Lies: Keeping Score*, 2015 (Fig.1, see page 6), the fragile layered glass is "impaled" in its centre by worn metal spikes that disrupt the beauty of the surface. This juxtaposition of material has associations with historical imagery related to the Crucifixion, creating a palpable psychological tension in the work.

Making use of a saturated and seductive red hue, other works such as *Dearg Mur*, 2015 (Fig.2) and *Bent But Not Broken*, 2016, are more "purist" glass art that have a quiet and meditative quality. The simple form and shape of these works calls to mind the pages of an open book, while the saturation of red has a visceral quality that references the body. A more direct and narrative work called *House of Cards*, 2017 (Fig.3) features classic "head shots" of Canadian political leaders and images of people casually gathered in the northern rural landscape. The glass cards are precariously "set against" each other in triangular formations, like the children's game



*Trajectories*, gallery view, Clay and Glass Gallery, Waterloo ON. Image Credit: Karl Griffiths-Fulton



Fig.2, Cheryl Wilson-Smith, *Dearg Mur*, 2015. Image courtesy of the artist

House of Cards; suggesting, perhaps, that political leaders often make decisions that affect the North but without consulting its citizens.

Benjamin Kikkert, who received much of his formative training in Ontario at Sheridan College and Harbourfront Centre, has established his professional practice on the west coast of Canada. With bodies of work called *Landmarks* and *Marine Artifacts* and a dominant palette of intense greens and blues, Kikkert's work is directly influenced by his geographical surroundings. In *Winter Pools*,

2018 (Fig.4) and *Jennings Cove Mussels*, 2016 (Fig.5) Kikkert creates deep "pools" of saturated colour that are contrasted with more rugged surfaces resembling rocky shorelines and barnacles.

While referencing and celebrating these elemental forces of nature, Kikkert's work equally reminds viewers that water is a threatened and increasingly politicized resource. His assemblage sculpture *Final Harvest: Hollow Catch*, 2017, has an overall circular form made of reclaimed metal that references a trap used for commercial fishing.



Fig.3, Cheryl Wilson-Smith, *House of Cards*, 2017  
Image Credit: Karl Griffiths-Fulton



Fig.4, Benjamin Kikkert, *Winter Pools*, 2018. Image courtesy of the artist



Fig.5, Benjamin Kikkert, *Jennings Cove Mussels*, 2016. Image courtesy of the artist

The sculpture's "innards" contain no fish; just worn, weather-beaten, glass forms that are encrusted with glass barnacles. As sculpture, it also testifies to his practice of combining hot glass with mixed media. A lyrical and cautionary work, it reminds us that the earth's water is finite – and compromised.

Julia Reimer made new works for *Trajectories*, inspired by the vastness and simplicity of the Alberta landscape. Reimer has heightened sensitivity to small details in nature: she regularly gathers source material, in the form of photographs and objects, from the surrounding landscape. She then translates and interprets details like the bark of a tree, a spider web, or animal tracks, into the imagery of her glass. The central work that Reimer created for the exhibition was the *Gossamer Series*, 2017 (Fig.6) a grouping of

over 20 vessel forms in muted shades of blue, purple, and grey. As the title suggests, the vessels have a light and airy quality in and of themselves. Yet, when gathered into a grouping that had both verticality and density, they became a substantial presence that resembled a tree line on the prairie landscape.

*Trajectories* was an invitation to previous winners of the RBC Award for Glass to show new work. As such, the exhibition illustrated the growth in artists' practice stimulated by winning this prestigious award. Also featured in the *Trajectories* exhibition was the work of Ito Laïla Le François, Aaron Oussoren, Brad Turner, and Rachael Wong.

In 2016, RBC ended its funding commitment to the Award. To ensure continuity of this significant recognition of



Fig.6, Julia Reimer, *Gossamer Series Landscape*, 2017. Image Credit: Galla Theodosia

Canadian glass artists and their work, the 2017 Award for Glass was generously funded by a group of Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery supporters and friends.

*Trajectories* was, in part, an opportunity to pause and reflect: to acknowledge that emerging glass artists in Canada were generously supported through this award for a substantial ten years; and to appreciate the work that support enabled. It will be fascinating to watch the careers of these committed and talented artists; and it has been my honour to have had the opportunity to work closely with each of them.

To learn more about the *Trajectories* exhibition, including a video of the Opening Reception, go to Clay and Glass Gallery. To see work by the artists discussed in these reflections, go to [www.cherylwilsonsmith.com](http://www.cherylwilsonsmith.com) [www.benjaminkikkert.com](http://www.benjaminkikkert.com) and, for Julia Reimer, [www.firebrandglass.ca](http://www.firebrandglass.ca) The quote from Cheryl Wilson-Smith is taken from her website.

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