

The Evolution of Artistic Practice

Upstream Benefits has been an evolutionary project from word one. Initially conceived several years ago as an exhibition to commemorate over a decade of Oxygen Art Centre's presence and accomplishment in the community of Nelson, this project has morphed into an exhibition (and symposium) which acknowledge the place and people that contribute to artist-run-culture in a broader sense. Through the lens of ten artists who represent a wide gamut of artistic enterprise, this exhibit explores the - who/where/what/when/why - of artist-run culture, and the evolution of present day artistic practice in the Kootenays. The artists participating: Courtney Andersen, Susan Andrews Grace, Amy Bohigian, Brent Bukowski, Boukje Elzinga, Ian Johnston, Maggie Shirley, Natasha Smith, Deborah Thompson and Rachel Yoder, have all contributed to Oxygen Art Centre over the years, as exhibiting artists, members, curators, founders, board members, advocates, and have all had substantial and important portions of their respective practice take place here in the Nelson region. These artists are a sample of the plethora of creative people that live in 'our' midst, a survey of a very specific sub-culture, and not a definitive overview by any means. This exhibition is a way of celebrating both place and process – how artists create the culture that in turn support their ever-evolving practice, a snake-eating-its-own-tail sort of paradox if ever there was one. The call and response format of the Upstream Benefits exhibition allows these artists to present an early and a more recent work and contextualize the place/process and particulars which contributed to the works' creation and the evolution of the artists practice.

Place

One of the themes that runs through Upstream Benefits is the idea of place as a factor and influence within an artist's work and how place manifests itself within all facets of the creative process. Why is the art created 'here' different from work created elsewhere? The question is posed more as a meditation than as quantifiable factoid, and in the ruminating about 'place' we acknowledge an often overlooked but essential element. The landscape that an artist inhabits can come in many forms, the graffiti-esque dark alleys of Jean-Michel Basquiat; the symbolic dreamscapes of Salvador Dali; the measured exactitude of Alex Colville; the episodic scenes of Annie Pootoogook, all speak to an interiority of the artists' mind and the place in which that mind is suspended in time and space. Place is an amalgam, an emblem and very often a scene. How place is defined is not a marketing exercise, or a history lesson or a geographic detail, except when it is, of course, but that is the beauty of artistic interpretation, there is no breadcrumb trail, or landmark which fixes an artist to a spot or insists they represent what they see, only what they want to see or cannot avoid seeing; wherein lies the freedom and curse of artistic expression. How place manifests itself in art is a measured and wonderfully complicated facet, and cues and clues can be taken from pottery fragments from the Tang Dynasty to the cut metal of Courtney Anderson's fantastically titled *A Nationalist from France or Some Part of Southern Europe*, which I believe is a region just South of Salmo.

Arin Fay, Curator (2017)