

(un)invited happenstance

At first glance, the jagged and gestural marks on the surface of the works appear to be the result of uninvited happenstance during transit. However, upon closer examination, the marks are revealed as intentional and belie a codified shorthand that exploits a loose form of cartography.

A literal confirmation of mapping is provided with geographical contour lines drawn directly on the entirety of the longest wall on which ten pastel marked paper drawings are installed at various eye-lines. Starting with *Viterra Grain Terminal - July 17, 2016* and ending with *Wanuskewin - July 19, 2016* the works traverse the wall-map with an intentionality of place that encompasses the hamlet of Beaver Creek, points within the metropolitan area of Saskatoon, and extends north to Wanuskewin.

Book-ending the installation of pastel drawings on either perpendicular walls are two photographic works under drawn mylar overlays presenting the now familiar codified marks. *Grassland Waltz* and *Ravine Tango* provide two similar yet distinct narratives. *Grassland Waltz* is a conversation of landscape or vista and the expected horizon view of the prairie. *Ravine Tango* is a closeup view of an overgrown path as a possible passage to the expansive prairie vista. While both are romantic views, the intimate nature of *Ravine Tango* imparts a more visceral and lived experience of walking in the landscape.

Facing the cartographical drawing installation are seven small, unmarked photographic composites of equal halves that reveal little information as to location unless local knowledge is at hand. The most cryptic of this composite series is *Saskatoon – 008*. The right half of *Saskatoon – 008* is a close-up of a concrete wall, while the left side depicts a similar wall with a hole that peeks into a yard of green grass. *Saskatoon – 008* is a sort of legend for *Grassland Waltz* and *Ravine Tango*, one of hiding and revealing, and one of passages and obstacles when traversing the landscape.

To micro-site *Saskatoon – 008* as the legend for *Grassland Waltz* and *Ravine Tango* is to ignore the possibility that *Saskatoon – 008* also acts as a key to the entire exhibition. Rodney Konopaki and Rhonda Neufeld's collaborative effort: *52N 106W: Measured and Marked* is the result of two halves working in combination with various degrees of resistance to produce a whole. The obvious allusion to dance in the titling of works implies a negotiation where a partner is required, and perhaps the unspoken need for a lead in any good dance routine.

The jagged and gestural marks, once perceived as uninvited happenstance, now reveal through their codification an invitation to chance, interwoven with the intentional process of documentation.

“We made a simple observation that it was possible to walk and simultaneously carry a drawing board and paper to develop images that essentially become maps of the terrain we traverse. In essence, these drawing are a synthesis of gesture and blind contour drawing. They register human loco-motion and make it visible on the paper.” – excerpt from The Banff Centre residency findings, Rodney Konopaki and Rhonda Neufeld, 2009.

The marks are indeed the product of transit, but intentional ones created from process and mitigated by location. The key here is to recognize the literal negotiation of passages and obstacles in creating a lived cartography of place, or better, to embody the process of Konopaki and Neufeld's “human loco-motion.”

Yet, there is a catch. The key is subjective. As soon as one logic is applied, as soon as one image promises to unravel the problematic of place, another image and possible interpretation steps in as plausible. Any foothold is further lost as one learns how *Saskatoon – 008* and the other images in the composite series were produced.

“We have been curious from the start about what material in the world the other might select to work with and how they would frame, compose, and use it. Near the beginning of the collaboration we discovered the two-in-one function in a camera. The shutter of the camera needs to be clicked twice to complete the picture. After the first click of the shutter, the image in the view finder disappears... the second cameraperson has no idea what was photographed.” – Rodney Konopaki and Rhonda Neufeld, (didactic panel), The Gallery/art placement inc., 2017

If there is a key to collaborative mark making, the metaphoric fulcrum of decision making, it is offered but elusive. One possible solution is that we, the viewer, are the unwilling lead in this tango, and if so, then timing is everything.

In an adjacent room hangs *AI July 7 - 22, 2016*, a set of fourteen linocuts printed on sequential front pages of the Star Phoenix (Saskatoon SK) newspaper. Arranged in calendar formation, the works offer a sense of chronological structure and a respite from conceptual process. That is until one begins an in-depth exploration of the lush black marks of the linocuts, only to be repelled by the temporary proof-quality of the newspaper. But, this is the point, and one is back wrestling with the momentary, while being seduced by mark-making and process. A possible response is on the opposite wall with *Riversdale*, a black and earth-toned linocut made using the same blocks as *AI July 7 - 22, 2016*. Appearing as a formal response, *Riversdale* sets up the now familiar back-and-forth taunt between process and location, between method and execution.

Towards the front of the gallery facing the street are two larger horizontal works dating from 2013: *Valleyview Park (ed. 3/7)* and *Claybank Hills (ed.3/11)*. These works share a genealogy with *Chatham Spin II*, a linocut portfolio of eight unique prints, and highlight the fact that we are no longer referencing the local. Without direct reference and chronological immediacy one can explore the works with a sense of freedom. Perhaps this is the elusive key, one found in the generosity of the marks. Now dissociated from time and place, there is room for the viewer to take the proverbial lead, to be the carefree flâneur strolling along the lines and shapes of the prints.

It should be so easy. As one stands in front of *Valleyview Park (ed. 3/7)* the street is reflected in the glass framing of the hand coloured woodcut. The reflection is the range of the flâneur, and, while the street promises an escape from this complex negotiation, it is also the site of production. To exit the work and stroll the streets, to negotiate the passages and obstacles of the landscape, is to accept the map, its marks of happenstance, and to embody the process of “human loco-motion.” The gap or void, the missing link, not the links which exist, as Marcel Duchamp, Julian Schnabel and many others have referenced, is what Rodney Konopaki and Rhonda Neufeld have set about to claim with *52N 106W: Measured and Marked*.

Now there remains just one more uninvited happenstance – the lack of any possible exit.