

Alison Norlen

Alison Norlen received a BFA (Honours) degree from the University of Manitoba in 1987, and MFA from Yale University in 1989.

Selected solo exhibitions including *miari*, Line Gallery, North Bay, *l̄oht*, Actual Gallery, Winnipeg, *luna*, Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, *armature* Arch 2 Gallery, School of Architecture, U of M, Winnipeg, *glimmer* Kenderdine Gallery, Saskatoon, (travelling), *rollercoaster*, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, *edifice*, the Art Gallery of Kitchener-Waterloo, *Mirage*, Art Gallery fo Regina, *ala*, Oboro, Montreal, *float*, Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, (traveling). Selected group exhibitions include *Combine (World Loves Saskatchewan)*, York Quay Centre, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto, *Drawn Positions*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Imagineacity: Architectures for Creativity*, Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, NB, *Ladder Factories and wheat fields*, National Gallery of Canada, *Intangible Evidence*, The Rooms, St Johns, Newfoundland, *Just my Imagination*, Museum London, (travelled) Art Gallery of Windsor, MOCCA, Mendel Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Algoma, and *Wonderland*, Museum London. International exhibitions include *Faux Real*, Blank Project, Ann Arbor, MI, *MosaiCanada; Sign& Sound*, Seoul, Korea,, *Tekeningen III*, Quartair Art Contemporary Art Initiatives Dutch/Canada, Den Haag, Holland, and *the LA International Biennial Invitational*, and *Exhibition of America, 10th Annual Biennial in Printmaking, X Mostra Da Gravura*, Curitiba, Brazil.

Her work is in private collections in the United States and Canada, public collections of the National Gallery of Canada, The Mackenzie Art Gallery, the Confederation Centre for the Arts, the Rooms Gallery of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Mendel Art Gallery, the Manitoba Arts Council, the Canada Council Art Bank, and the Saskatchewan Arts Board.

Alison has received grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Manitoba Arts Council, and the Saskatchewan Arts Board, has been the recipient of an International Artist Residency in Trinidad by the Canada Council for the Arts and the International Artist Residency in Paris from the Canada Council.

Alison is teaching at the University of Saskatchewan and lives and works in Saskatoon.

Image List: All Works *Eccentricity* by Alison Norlen 2016 – 2018, mixed media.

This publication accompanies the exhibition ***Eccentricity*** by Alison Norlen and the commission ***Cornet*** Curated by Amber Andersen and presented at the Estevan Art Gallery & Museum, from **June 15th – August 24th, 2018**.

Director/Curator:	Amber Andersen
Education, Outreach, and Programming Coordinator:	Raven Broster-Paradis
Eccentricity Poster Design (Top centre front):	Ray Lodoen

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ISBN 978-1-988745-11-4

The EAGM would like to thank the following organisations for their support:



Eccentricity

Alison Norlen, June 15th – August 24th, 2018

Eccentricity, as presented by Alison Norlen at the Estevan Art Gallery & museum from June 15th – August 24th, 2018.

The following is a casual e-mail interview between myself, Director/Curator Amber Andersen and Alison Norlen on Friday, June 15th, 2018.

Amber Andersen) What inspired or attracted you to visual arts? You have such a unique back story, I think it is so interesting!

Alison Norlen) I was not a childhood protégé, or particularly exceptional at anything and was very average with wonderfully young parents and a happy childhood. I grew up in Kenora, out of town a short way, and did not have running water until I was ten years old. I was told by my high school teacher that had a knack for drawing, but I had never entered an art gallery until in my early twenties. I moved to Winnipeg at seventeen and entered barbering school (working in the men’s section because I had allergies to the chemicals in the women’s stylists section). I worked for years as a barber in a small traditional barber shop between 1980 and 1987. I started taking a few classes in film study, which grew into a lifelong passion as well as a drawing class, and then another...eventually desiring to take more and more classes...which lead to me getting my BFA honors at the University of Manitoba, and then my MFA at Yale.

AA) Is there an artist or artists that have informed your work?

AN) There are many artists whose work I admire, however, there are creative individuals and practises whose work I equally admire such as some filmmakers, architects, fashion designers. Also, my work also is influenced by other things that are extraordinary; things made by hand, things well-crafted, thoughtfully planned, that have individuality, uniqueness, character and charm, which can evoke empathy, has integrity and is authentic.

AA) What does “Eccentricity” reference? Is it a specific place?

AN) Technically the word alludes to a deviated curve, and the extent to which a conical section of a circle, ellipse, hyperbola or parabola might not be” circular”. I see eccentricity as many things;

Places that celebrate their one-of-a-kindness, that takes us into another place, outside of our selves, into experiences unpredicted, unknown or unreal?

That which is unconventional, which is not limited to simplistic description or characteristics, or falls into the realm of unusual because it is not within the “norm” of conventional taste, look or behaviour, is free/spirited, self-expressive.....interesting!

AA) Your art practice very much deals with spectacle and the carnivalesque. What attracted you to this subject matter?

AN) First the house I grew up in, our living room was a combination of animal print patterns, furniture covered in fun fur simulating leopard, zebra and giraffe stripes and spots, vinyl rhino hides and many jungle-like plants because my dad was both a hunter and fisherman. We had a moose horn table a bear skin rug, and a fish net full of seashells and buoys hanging from the ceiling. I like to say I grew up in a theme park. I also worked (my first job) at a drive-in movie theatre / miniature golf course, I love the vicarious travel lead by a ball to a Holland windmill, a pagoda, to a giant squid and the nostalgia

AA) In your opinion, why do you think we, as a public, have such a fascination with things such as carnivals, fairs, roadside attractions, etc...?

AN) The wonderful qualities such as the absurdity, the ridiculous, the extreme.... How we identify to it, for example if we are small next to something oversized we lose our previous understanding of our connection to it, it becomes new

There are the theories of escapism, the necessity of stepping out of mundanity, boredom but many constructed sites of fantasy are uninteresting, too cute, literal or sanitized. Where these sites are more interesting is when they are independent/individual, are not the main stream elements that others tell us should be interested in...

AA) Which came first, the drawings that resemble your metal work assemblages, or metal works than drawings? Or was it the prints! They all seem to inform each other and have such a dynamic relationship that seems reciprocal.

AN) The drawings are my most immediate work, it is a form of thinking. I began making small metal soldered structures to attempt building an image in 3d form and have since worked back and forth and it has become increasingly important to the way I think about my process and chosen subject

AA) I know we are both avid lovers of the horror genre. Do you think that your love of horror is presents itself in your art practice?

AN) No but I love the inside jokes of horror, the riff on a riff, the tributes to those that came before and the one-upmanship

AA) What is something you would like to see or visit that you have not had the opportunity to yet?

AN) Venice and the idea of a floating city...some of the abandoned cities in Asia where the jungle has grown them in.

AN) What is a piece of advice you would give to emerging artists?

AA) Be tenacious, fear kills creativity

Eccentricity and Cornet Commission Project Description

My work is a reflection on my long and passionate interest in cultural spectacles, idyllic environments, and real existing/imagined and diminished architectures, landscapes and escapist environments. I have been conducting research and producing work based on miniature golf courses, pinball machines, parades, celebrations, festivals, architectural follies, and both small, humble and fantastic international events. I have traveled to world fairs sites, theme parks, the carnivals of Rio de Janeiro and Trinidad, all night candlelit vigil celebrations for Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead) and museums of oddities and curiosities. Whether hugely impressive and spectacular or mundane and private these journeys have inspired my work for many years.

I grew up in Kenora Ontario, and home of the 40-foot-high Husky the Muskie muskellunge sculpture which sits in McLeod park overlooking the picturesque Lake of the Woods. My first job was working the Rabbit Lake drive in theatre, where I worked as the popcorn girl or worked at the miniature golf course. I fell in love with the course being a kind of virtual travel labyrinth, moving from a Dutch windmill, to a pagoda, to a lighthouse, all through the act of chasing a little ball. My affection and fascination has led me to build miniature and massive icons that are intended

as references/tributes to pleasure palaces, expositions/world's fair remnants, follies, buildings in various and ambiguous states of construction and demolition and object and icons that are nostalgic.

My exhibition “eccentricity” and on-site construction of the sculpture “cornet” continues this effort to represent aspects of utopia, fantasy, memory, personal narration, melancholy and metaphor. I will be installing large scale drawings, a kinetic Ferris wheel, and building, while in Estevan a large transparent ice cream cone. This roadside attraction will pay homage to the Estevan 1954 Dairy Queen, and its being the second only to be built in Saskatchewan. Alison Norlen, June 01, 2018

Project Description (provided by the Dunlop Art Gallery)

Roadside Attractions is one of the 200 exceptional projects funded through the Canada Council for the Arts New Chapter initiative. With this \$35M initiative, the Council supports the creation and sharing of the arts in communities across Canada. Additional funding for Roadside Attractions is provided by Tourism Saskatchewan’s Event Hosting Program for Special Tourism Projects.

Saskatchewan is geographically diffuse. While half of the province resides in urban centres, the other half are spread across small communities and reserves on Treaty 4, Treaty 6 and Treaty 10 territories. This Prairie sprawl, along with the” boom and bust” rhythm of its resource-based economies, has shaped Saskatchewan people’s ways of life and ways of thinking about working with the land... The free public services offered by libraries, museums and cultural centres, often situated in within the downtown cores of Saskatchewan’s many cities and small towns are critically important services serving as spaces for cultural exchange and participation.

Roadside Attractions, organized by Dunlop Art Gallery, presents a network of contemporary art commissions across Saskatchewan during the summer of 2018. Each artist participating in *Roadside Attractions* considers the unique histories, geographies, and populations of various locations – factors that have shaped dozens of Saskatchewan spaces into meaningful places.