

# laying claim. works & artists

## Amalie Atkins. Embrace (2011). Video. 3min 26sec.

Amalie Atkins is a multidisciplinary artist who creates cinematic fables through a blend of film, textiles, installations, performance, and photography. Her work offers a glimpse of prairie upbringing, a love of storytelling, and an affection for both whimsy and darkness, with a distinctive hand-made craft aesthetic.

Amalie Atkins' recent solo exhibition and accompanying catalogue, we live on the edge of disaster and imagine we are in a musical, was co-organized by the MacKenzie Art Gallery (Regina, SK) and the Southern Alberta Art Gallery (Lethbridge, AB), and she was commissioned by Remail Modern to create The Little Black Egg Listening Hut for Guy Maddin's mixtape at Nuit Blanche Saskatoon 2015. She currently lives and works in Saskatoon, SK, Canada.

## Nida Home Doherty. When They First Came (1985) Video 4min 30sec.

Nida Home Doherty opened and is operating a commercial art gallery, Centracity Gallery, in London, Ontario. She was an active and founding member of Neutral Ground in Regina, Saskatchewan as an artist and as an administrator.

## Evelyn Spice Cherry. Windbreaks on the Prairies (1943) film, digital transfer. 18 min.

Evelyn Spice Cherry was a pioneering documentary filmmaker. A producer, director, scriptwriter, and editor, she was a driving force at the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) in the 1940s. With her husband, cameraman Lawrence Cherry, she formed her own company, Cherry Film Productions Ltd., in Regina in 1961. She made over 100 films between 1929 and 1979. Born in Yorkton, Cherry taught public school before earning a journalism degree from the University of Missouri in 1929. Her films include New Horizons (1940), Windbreaks for the Prairies (1942), That They May Live (1942), Soil for Tomorrow (1945), Land for Men (1945), and Water for the Prairies (1950). (bio condensed from Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan entry written by Christine Ramsay)

## Clark Ferguson. Prairie Farmer Jeans (2007) Video. 8min 14sec. & website

Clark Ferguson is a filmmaker and artist living originally from Saskatchewan, now living in Montreal. More recently Ferguson has been talking more about 'place' within his work and is interested in place as a defining element of all of the above rooted issues. Humour and the absurd are two of the primary tools that Ferguson uses to critique and transcend sensitive narratives within Canada's history.

Much of his work has been presented within art gallery and festival contexts and has been to broadcast. His work has traveled to festivals such as Festival du Nouveau Cinema in Montreal, the Yellowknife International Film Festival, The Sudbury International Cinefest Film Festival, The En Regard Court Metrage Film Festival, Winnipeg's WNDX, Germany's Open Air Weiterstadt Film Festival, and have Tales from the Deep presenting in CBC's National Independent film program Canadian Reflections.

## Tasha Hubbard. Buffalo Calling (2013) Animation/Video. 12min 25sec.

Tasha Hubbard is a writer, filmmaker, and an assistant professor at the University of Saskatchewan's Department of English. She is from Peepeekisis First Nation in Treaty Four Territory, and is the mother of a ten-year-old son. Her research is on Indigenous efforts to return the buffalo to the lands and to Indigenous consciousness. Her first solo writing/directing project Two Worlds Colliding, about Saskatoon's infamous Starlight Tours, premiered at ImagineNATIVE in 2004, was broadcast on CBC's documentary program Roughcuts in 2004, and won the Canada Award at the 2005 Gemini Awards. She also recently premiered a NFB-produced feature documentary called Birth of a Family, about a 60s Scoop family reunited for the first time, which landed in the top ten audience choice list at this year's Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Film Festival. Tasha also does research on Indigenous film and is appointed to the National Film Board's newly formed Indigenous Advisory Council.

## Brian Stockton. Saskatchewan (2002) 16mm, digital transfer. 6min

Brian Stockton is a filmmaker and educator who works in a variety of genres including animation, documentary and drama. He holds an MFA from York University and was a director resident at Norman Jewison's Canadian Film Centre. His recent focus has been on humorous autobiographical films including his acclaimed Saskatchewan Trilogy (2002-2006), and the one-hour documentary My Dinner with Generation X (2010). His latest project is the feature film comedy The Sabbatical (2015). He currently teaches film production at his alma mater, the University of Regina.

## Jessica MacCormack & Alexis Young. Where we were not; Feeling Reserved, Alexis' story (2012) Animation/Video 6min.

Working with animation, video, painting, drawing, installation and intervention, Jessica MacCormack's interdisciplinary practice examines the complex position of culture within neoliberal capitalism and critiques modes of social control, while exploring the potential for art to function as a site of resistance. They are specifically interested in how modes of violence are perpetuated collectively through popular narratives, concepts of justice and denial of accountability. MacCormack's practice has included an ongoing commitment to working with women and youth who are in conflict with the law, through the creation of art projects in prisons as well as at numerous centres that support marginalized people.

Alexis Young (Métis) is a two-spirited woman who lives in Toronto. She grew up in the bush and moved to the big city (Winnipeg) as a young teenager. She has been a videomaker since 2005, when she began working on projects with professional mentors at Crossing Communities Art Project in Winnipeg. Her work has been screened nationally and internationally at ImagiNative, Inside Out LGBT Film Festival and Bildwechsel (Hamburg, Germany) to name but a few. Her dream is to be a journalist

## Amber Christensen. exhibition curator.

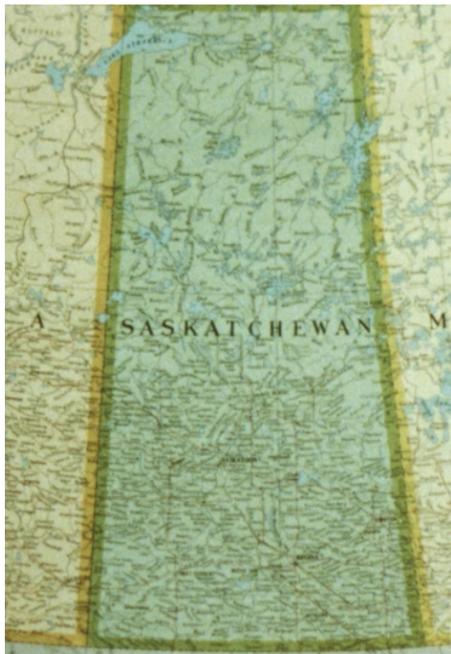
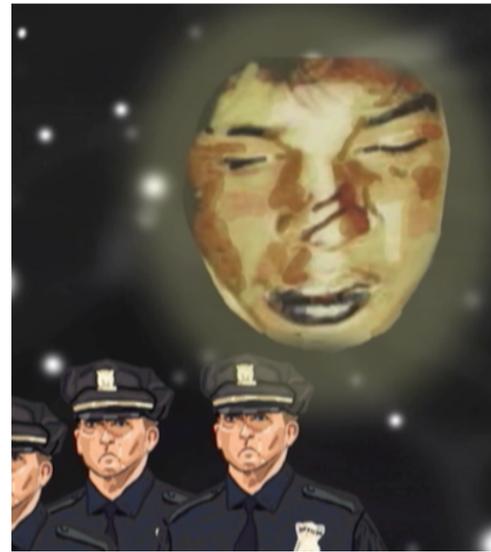
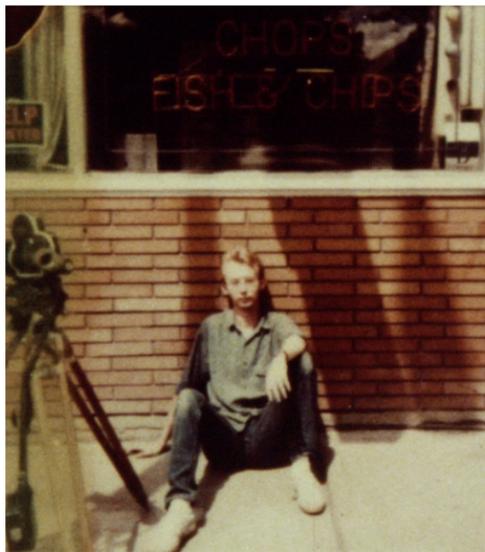
Amber Christensen is a researcher, arts organizers, librarian and independent media arts curator. She holds an MA in Cinema and Media Studies from York University and a Master of Library and Information Studies from the University of British Columbia. Her research and curatorial practice explores feminist modes of cultural productions, concepts of regionalism, particularly within the prairie regions and she is interested in the possibility of affective experiences within the exhibition space. She has curated exhibitions and film and video screenings for InterAccess (Toronto), Neutral Ground (Regina, SK), Vtape (Toronto, ON), Saskatchewan Filmpool (Regina, SK), Regional Support Network (Toronto, ON) and is a past member of the Toronto based Pleasure Dome Film and Video Curatorial Collective. She is originally from Saskatchewan and currently resides in Brandon MB.

# laying claim

amalie atkins, evelyn spice cherry, clark ferguson,  
tasha hubbard, jessica macCormack, alexus young, brian stockton



july 28th to september 1st, 2017  
Estevan Art Gallery & Museum



"Laying Claim" is an exhibition that brings together film and video works made by artists who live(d) within, or whose work responds in some way, to the geographical, socio-political-cultural space sometimes referred to as Saskatchewan. Partly a selective survey of film and video practices that spans from the 1940s to contemporary works, this exhibition also proposes to create a space for the critical exploration of regionalism and the construction/deconstruction/reconstruction of regional identities.

Saskatchewan's borders are inclusive of Treaties 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 10 territories.<sup>1</sup> The Estevan and Art Gallery & Museum and exhibition are located on Treaty 4 and is the traditional territory of Cree, Anishinaabeg, and Assiniboine peoples and is closely adjacent to Treaty 2, which is the traditional territory of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Assiniboine, Dakota and Dene people.<sup>2</sup>

I am, myself, a non-indigenous person of mixed European background (German, English, Russian-Mennonite, Danish) and though born in Winnipeg, I only spent a few weeks there before my family moved back to Saskatchewan. I was raised in various places all around the province by parents with strong agrarian familial ties, though they were some of the first of their family to leave the farm for the city. I have been wanderer in much of adulthood, returning and leaving to Saskatchewan many times, and currently I live in Brandon, Manitoba. But if someone asks me where my home is, my answer is always Saskatchewan.

Creating an exhibition that is based on a place, or region, and one that is effectively being defined by boundaries of an imperialist project, like that of Saskatchewan is challenging, and a little tenuous. There are many opportunities for failure, but also, hopefully, many opportunities for self-reflection of one's own relationship/position to a place.

Acknowledging the treaty territories for myself as a person of settler/European non-indigenous background comes with along with the need to recognize and willingness to sit with the difficult settler colonial history of this province. The treaties, which are agreements between sovereign nations, are not being upheld with original intent and spirit of the agreements. This has resulted in the dispossession of First Nations peoples from their lands, with long lasting impacts on Indigenous peoples in Canada. At the same time, land acknowledgements are also a public declaration of solidarity with the original intention of the treaties, that we are all treaty people.

I propose that "Saskatchewan", within this exhibition is highly malleable 'thing'. Something that is in fact incapable of holding fast onto any sort of static identity. "Saskatchewan", rather than a concrete entity is instead an intellectual and affective space for the contestation, negotiation, grieving and celebration of what this place is, and our own relationship to this place. A proposition that is made possible through the works in this exhibition by the artists Tasha Hubbard, Clark Ferguson, Amalie Atkins, Evelyn Spice Cherry, Alexis Young, Jessica MacCormack, Brian Stockton and Nida Home Doherty. The works in Laying Claim offer a way to move us from the abstract to the personal, the funny, to the sad and to serve as articulations of moments/feelings that can edge us towards re-imagining of other possibilities for the future.<sup>3</sup>



The images in this exhibition are primarily evocative of the area of the province known geographically as the (Northern) Great Plains.<sup>4</sup> Agrarian images of wheat fields, as seen in Evelyn Spice Cherry's 1943 National Film Board production "Windbreaks on the Prairies" are measured against the intimate and personal micro-histories of Amalie Atkins' "Embrace". Atkins' video provides a vicarious glimpse into the warmth of bonds held by those with shared bloodlines. Brian Stockton's autobiographical film, heavily features the rolling prairie landscape, traces his identity along a road-map of his home province.<sup>5</sup> Rural-settler tropes are self consciously/cheekily mocked in Clark Ferguson's "Prairie Farmer Jeans"—a website and single channel video that invites the viewer to slip into a farmer's pre-worn jeans to uncover that authentic farmer experience. Tasha Hubbard's experimental video examines the irreversible and damaging effects inflicted by colonial actions on the original buffalo herds and by extension the First Nations' people. Nida Home Doherty's video, "When They First Came" is from the early era of Saskatchewan's video art scene. Doherty's video is a ghostly record of the absurd rigidity of the Dominion Land Survey imposed on the tall grass prairies, part of the project that duped immigrants with false promises of flourishing family homesteads. Alexis Young and Jessica MacCormack's collaborative work "Where We Were Not: Feeling Reserved", is a recent reminder of the legacies of the colonial project. MacCormack's animation brings to life Young's first hand account of her experience with the Saskatoon City Police's Starlight Tours.<sup>6</sup>

Laying claim may mean agitating against the histories of the early colonial projects of the Hudson's Bay Company and Dominion of Canada that claimed land as part of an empire building project that was not theirs to be claimed. Or possibly it's just a gentle nudge reminding us to look inward with a critical eye at ourselves, to our shared homes, which sometimes means having to accept uncomfortable histories (both recent and distant). While at other times it is a chance to reflect on our past to better understand our present. The title of this essay/exhibition, "Laying Claim" is meant to potentially offer a way of pushing back against long held colonial/regional ideas, to embrace discomfort, and at other times to just sit with multitudes of interwoven histories and experiences that all exist within this shared space of Saskatchewan. [Amber Christensen]

footnotes:

1. These are the treaties that are located within the boundaries of the province of Saskatchewan. Office of the Treaty Commissioner.
2. Encyclopaedia of Saskatchewan. Treaty 4 & Treaty Relations Committee of Manitoba
3. This is building off of postcolonial scholar Arif Dirlik's idea of 'critical localism', where the local can reclaim diversity and offers ways to examine colonialism/oppression and settler colonial ties. Rule, John. Practising Place: A Critical Approach to Localism. In "Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal", Vol3, No.1, 2011, 2.
4. The Great Plains spans from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains and from the North Saskatchewan to the Rio Grande. Encyclopaedia of the Great Plains. Saskatchewan & Kaye, Frances W. Meditation and History on the Great Plains. Edmonton: AU Press, 2011, 5.
5. Brian Stockton's autobiographical short film is titled "Saskatchewan"
6. Believed to have started as early as 1976 and into the mid 2000s, the Starlight Tours refers to a practice by the Saskatoon Police Force of driving (primarily Indigenous people) who were intoxicated to the outskirts of the city in the winter months. One person is known to have died as a result. Radford, Evan. Starlight Tour - a timeline, Saskatoon Star Phoenix (January 14, 2015).

