

Diana Chisholm BIOGRAPHY:

Diana Chisholm is a multi-disciplinary artist whose work is rooted in sculpture and installation. Diana's work focuses on the industrial nature of place and navigating new landscapes through multiple perspectives, humour, and social media. She received an MFA from the University of Saskatchewan ('15) and a BFA from Memorial University of Newfoundland ('12) and a BSc. in Interdisciplinary Studies from St. Francis Xavier University ('05). Chisholm has participated in group and solo exhibitions nationally and participated in residencies in Saskatchewan and Newfoundland. Diana lives and works in Corner Brook and Woody Point, Newfoundland where she is the Executive Director of Writers at Woody Point.

Image List:

- Holiday table centerpiece*, found object, 2019
- cat litter box full of hair product (ten dollars)*, found object, 2019
- pick up only. no delivery*, moving blankets, wood, 2019
- gently used*, found object, 2019
- she never received so it's not cursed*, found object, 2019
- tools not included*, found object, 2019
- if you want it you'll have to take it out of the wall yourself*, insulation, vapor barrier, wood, 2019
- need gone today (chair)*, found object, 2019
- all one piece*, found object, plywood, 2019
- of a place (empty of people)*, digital images, 2016

Front Cover: *all one piece*, found object, 2019, image courtesy of artist

This publication accompanies the exhibition **Delete if not Aloud** presented at the Estevan Art Gallery & Museum, from **February 01 2019 – March 29, 2019**.

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Diana Chisholm: AN INTERVIEW

Curated by Amber Andersen

The following is an e-mail interview I conducted with Diana Chisholm regarding *Delete if not Aloud*. This interview took place on January 31st, 2019.

Amber Andersen) In talking to you about your practice “place”, as in physical geography or virtual space, and how a community interacts/navigates within space seems to inform the vast majority of your practice. While you were the Estevan Arts Council’s Artist in Residence, you became intrigued with a Facebook group called “Garage Sale Estevan”. Why did you elect to observe and interpret that space and that particular community? How is this specifically reflective of Estevan versus other cities with similar online garage sale groups?

Diana Chisholm) When I moved to Estevan I engaged with *Garage Sale Estevan* for the groups intended purpose, a buy and sell platform where I could purchase items for my apartment. The group postings continued to pop up on my feed and one day a sale post with no accompanying image struck me as both odd and interesting. The post stated "cat litter box full of hair product \$10".

Interpreting this literally, I wondered why would something as intimate as shampoo be paired with something used to contain animal waste? It was both humorous and off-putting when considering the respective functions of these products. As I scrolled through over a dozen comments, I noticed that the seller had eventually posted a picture of what was for sale: a re-used cardboard box full of hair product. The idea of a cardboard cat litter box being used as a standard measure of volume is equally odd. The intersection of the tangible and intangible, with respect to social media platforms, creates both something else of substance, yet something undermined. Appropriating this strange combination, provoked a closer look at sale sites as sites of engagement, information, transition and transformation.

The research process for this body of work included following many buy and sell groups from across the country. This broadened my understanding of how individuals use buy and sell groups for their intended function and how the groups become sites of social interaction. What I have found is that each group is

unique to the community in which its users reside. In some cases the groups are reflective of an exchange of particular commodities, in others they serve as lost dog networks and in Estevan, an effective portrait of an oil town during bust-times.

AA) The series of photos mounted on foam core entitled “of a place (empty of people)” differ, I feel, from the other pieces in the exhibition. Can you speak to this piece specifically? Was this just about capturing Estevan physically, or is it meant to give background information about the place? They imitate old polaroids aesthetically. What was the idea behind this decision?

DC) The series of *a place (empty of people)* is a physical exploration that initially existed on social media and in particular Instagram. I arrived shortly after the bust in the oil and gas industry and it was interesting to get to know this place at that time. I felt very much like an outsider, in a place where a lot of the transient workers and people not from Estevan had recently picked up and left. As a result my initial explorations of the city were of the back alleys, vacant industrial areas, and abandoned half constructed buildings.

The work attempts to unite two seemingly disparate roles: the artist and the transient worker. Many in both camps rightfully understand themselves as strays, their chosen paths demanding of them a nomadic existence. Though all this wandering and wondering impedes the option of putting down roots, it offers a more developed understanding of place(s). This may be reward enough, for many working artists and rig workers.

In this exhibition, I use this piece to ground the found object sculptures that reflect the Facebook sale group posts.

AA) How do you feel people’s interactions online, specifically within “Garage Sale Estevan”, a group chat of sorts, differ from a face-to-face interaction? What have you derived from your observations of this group?

DC) The posts hawking previously-enjoyed goods on the site *Garage Sale Estevan* offer an opportunity to examine the city’s material culture. These groups operate under guidelines and rules but the participants often develop their own operating procedures, lines of communication and language, with the members taking on the enforcement of rules. At some point differences of opinions or conflict must have led the group to split:

new rules and operating procedures appear with the induction of *Garage Sale Estevan 2* and *Garage Sale Estevan - New and Improved*.

Sale posts are often reflective of the times of a place - people moving in or out - recreational activities or the economic constraints of a place. These groups are also a place where new ways of looking at things, units of measure, a sense of time and humour can surface. The phrase “Delete if not Allowed” is often used for those unsure of the rules of the group or the established social etiquette. Much like my own exploration of the group as an indication of place, it is a way to get to know the group and its norms. This uncertainty is a kind of interstitially, an ongoing negotiation by members trying to belong to a frequently shifting group. The unknown space between the pronouncements of the officially posted rules and what might just work mirrors the material realities of volumes of stuff up for purchase on these sites.

AA) Most of the art works in this exhibition are installation or involve ready-made sculptures. What are some of the challenges when working with installation and ready-made sculptural practices?

DC) Recently my work has been primarily focused on various understandings and interpretations of place. Grounded through sculpture, digital photography and installation I explore place using industry, humour and social media. For this exhibition I paired the social media based *of a place (empty of people)* with a series of found-object sculptures derived from actual *Garage Sale Estevan* posts. Working with installation and sculpture is both challenging and exciting for me. Both are concerned with space as a foundation and space is key when considering place and how we as humans navigate our own personal spaces. However, spaces and gallery spaces in particular, are challenging in terms of the scale of both the room and the work.

I often work with found materials as to create sculptures but working with found objects and ready-made sculpture is a departure for me. It was important to me to use the Facebook sale groups for the research, the sourcing of materials and in turn the process for completing the work. Though perhaps inadvertent, the absurd remix here recalls Dadaist strategies and pays homage to artists such as Duchamp.

All of the work in the exhibition references an actual post from *Garage Sale Estevan* and I created ISO (In Search Of) posts to source the objects that compose the

majority of the work in the gallery; so both inspiration and the materials were derived from the community. The challenge in using the online platform to source the material was in knowing that the particular objects I was looking for might not be available at the time of install.

AA) I feel most of the works in this exhibition have a sense of humour provided by the titles. Let’s talk about how significant the use of language is in this particular exhibition. As you have already intimated, this exhibition is based on a social media garage sale chat room. It is my assumption that language is going to be intrinsic to the development of the works. How has language impacted how the works developed in this exhibition? Or did it at all?

DC) The work is an exploration of alternative portraits of place but it also turned into an anthropological look at how individuals communicate, interact and use social media based sales groups. Language and communication is at the core of those interactions and often informed the portrait of place that began to take shape. As I mentioned earlier online groups operate under guidelines and rules but the participants often develop their own operating procedures, lines of communication and language.

The title *Delete if Not Aloud* emerged early on in my exploration of *Garage Sale Estevan* which is interesting to me because deciding on titles for both exhibitions and individual works is often a challenge for me. Choosing this title allowed me to have some fun with the language used by both buyers and sellers to help shape the way in which I sourced the material and how I titled the works. The short hand language of digital media is a common means of communication (LOL, BRB, TL;DR). Emojis shaped the way we communicate daily and has effected the expediency of that communication. With this in mind I used the buy and sell short hand ISO to create ‘in search of posts’ to source material while often the language of the original posts were often the best fit for the titles of individual works.