

JANET SHAW-RUSSELL ARTIST STATEMENT:

I am interested in examining our desire for permanence in an ephemeral world. I explore life's crossroads in order to discover how we navigate change. With graphite and coloured pencils, I draw on the delicate tissue-paper of sewing patterns and the translucent membrane of vellum. Home and the body become metaphors for the life cycle, illuminating the paradox of human fragility and resilience. I explore the universal in personal transitions, such as when a family home is sold or a loved one dies.

Canadian demographics shift and baby-boomers age. Seniors live in empty nests, retire, downsize and move into "homes". As the past recedes, the present beckons and Janet has added a focus on the art of aging. Answering her desire to draw from life, Janet has partnered with biologists, neuroscientists and anthropology professors to expand her scientific knowledge and connect her art with a wide variety of disciplines.

JANET SHAW-RUSSELL BIOGRAPHY:

Born and raised in Winnipeg, Janet has lived in southwestern Manitoba since 1983, primarily living in Virden and then Brandon. Her work has been exhibited throughout Manitoba, from Brandon's Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, to Winnipeg's Martha St. Studio, Buhler Gallery, and MHC Gallery to smaller community galleries across Manitoba including Wasagaming, Churchill, Gimli and beyond.

Janet is a co-founder of the women's art collective, Drawn Together, comprised of ten Manitoba artists from Carberry, Brandon, Holmfield, Kenton, and St. Pierre-Jolys. She is a former MAWA Foundation mentorship mentee (2010-2011) and Manitoba Arts Council Creation Grant recipient (2013, 2017 and 2018).

This publication accompanies the exhibition *Sheltered* presented at the Estevan Art Gallery & Museum, from **January 24 – March 20, 2020**.

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Amber Andersen

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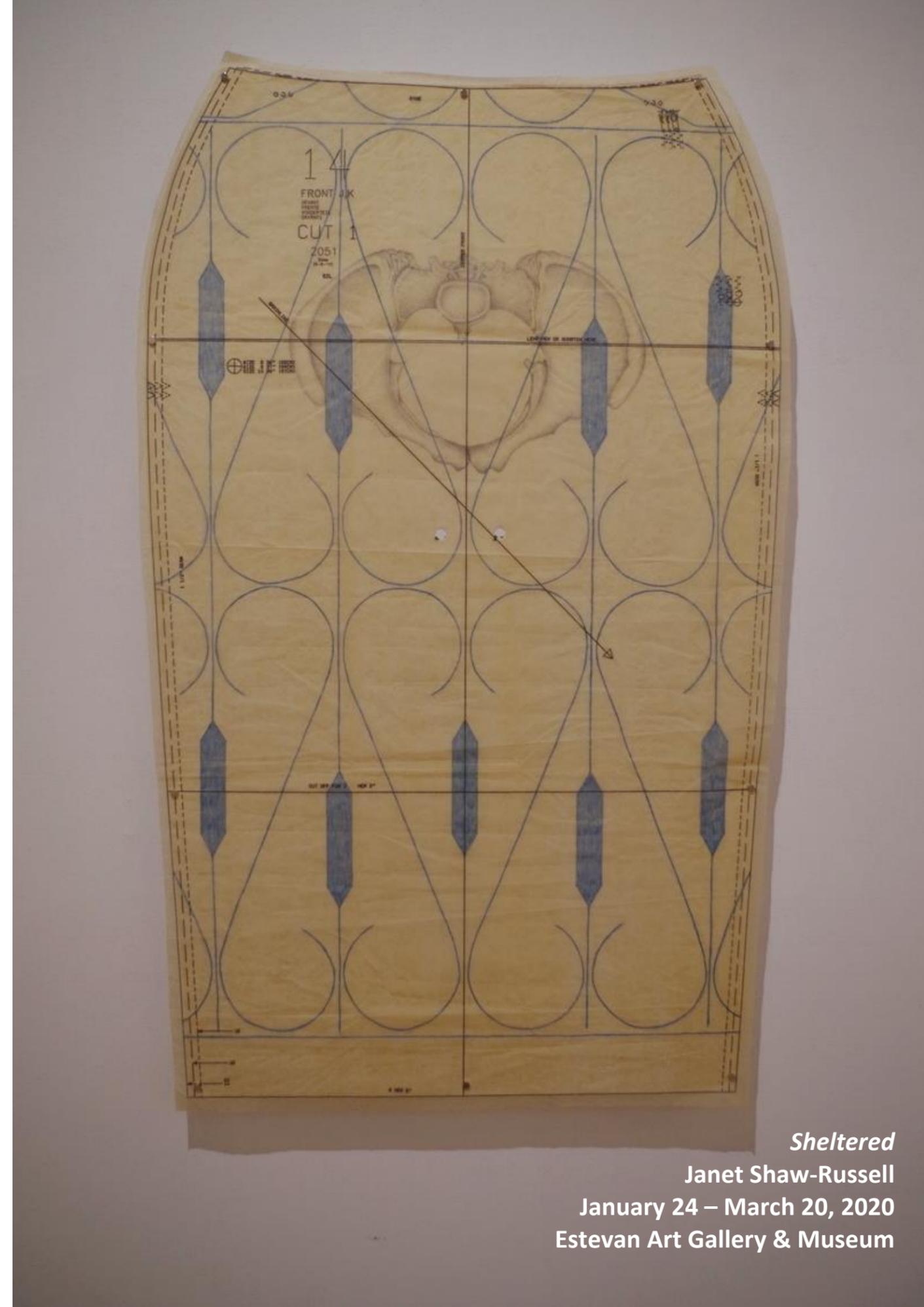
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JANET SHAW-RUSSELL: AN INTERVIEW

The following is an e-mail interview conducted between Director/Curator Amber Andersen and Janet Shaw-Russell regarding *Sheltered*. This interview took place on via e-mail on January 22, 2020.

AMBER ANDERSEN) There are many elements that reference domestic space, from wallpaper, to sculpted hinges of doors, to china and doilies...There is also the juxtaposition/stand in for the body within these elements. I interpreted this as the body as the first home we know, and much like a house, the interior or the bones of a house are rarely something people get to see/touch/feel. There is something that is both familiar yet alienating. Is this part of what you were exploring? What were you exploring in "Sheltered" in your own words?

JANET SHAW-RUSSELL) I was a professional interior designer for 40 years. I measured client's homes with a metal tape measure in hand, drew the layouts on graph paper and then transposed that information into architectural blueprints. I would notice and take photos of architectural details. For me, to measure, touch, and see the bones of a home is a form of connection, a way to know it.

You may sense a nostalgia for home - the feeling of loss we experience as we move from one much-loved home/community to another. The paper sculptures of hinges and their posts called "Unsettled" or the rubbings/sculptures of doorknob and door plate motifs called "My Fond Farewell" instill into memory a time, a place and a life.

Since I use anatomical imagery on domestic items like wallpaper or the skin-like texture of sewing patterns for sculpted hinges, my work can remind us of our own mortality - a subject we often won't address.

In "Sheltered", I examine the connection between home and the body - how dwellings mold us and we shape and transform our dwellings.

I do see the body as home. This series reveres the body which paradoxically both shelters and fails us. Several artworks in this show deal with the body's strength and resilience. Some examples are "Dressed for Battle" or the colour wallpaper, "Breast Wallpaper 1". Other works focus on the body's fragility such as "This Fragile Dwelling Place", "Luna's Curse" or the black and white "Breast Wallpaper

2". The sewing pattern tissue also reflects these properties of fragility and strength.

In my most recent work, "Sigh", "Vent and Gateway" I drew female pelvic bones in graphite pencil on dress and skirt patterns and combined them with coloured pencil rubbings/drawings of architectural elements from our 1906 heritage home. For "In Limbo" I combined graphite drawings of a female leg bone and manubrium, with a photopolymer "breast" print and rubbings from an air vent. These artworks explore the imprint of home on the body over time.

A house, like the body, provides temporary sanctuary and shelter. At some point, we move on.

AA) I read the use of sewing patterns as a stand in for the body. However, they also relate to the idea of domesticity, among other things. To me, it also refers to ideas of handmade, or putting effort and work into something and I think that is echoed through the painstaking care of the drawings that you do of various anatomy. Did you intentionally want to create dialogue about time?

JSR) My work focuses on the passage of time. Each series explores how we navigate the various stages of our lives. We share this untenable belief in permanence, but eventually we must accept change. With time and experience, we recognize that nothing and no one lasts forever. It sounds fatalistic to put it this way but instead I see is our strength and resilience as we face life's impermanence.

Canadian demographics have shifted to include a large and growing population of seniors. The elderly experience many transitions as they age. They live in empty nests, retire, downsize and move, sometimes from their long-term communities into "homes". Through this series, I share my perspective on the art of aging.

AA) The vessels and sacs are made of the sewing pattern paper and, I believe, meant to emulate aspects of the body. Why the pattern paper and what inspired these pieces?

JSR) Sewing pattern tissue has a skin-like quality in its translucency, texture and colour. I made orb-like shapes from white tissue paper in the past. As I work with sewing pattern tissue, I mold this membrane into objects that evoke wombs, vessels and sacs. I deliberately form some from just a single layer of tissue

so they slump. Others I explode to reveal the body's vulnerability.

AA) With the *Wish* series, each plate has a cloche lid, and each one contains a small sculpture meant to look like a wishbone. I assume this is constructed from the sewing pattern paper and an armature. There are also layers of papers underneath the wishbone, some of maps, some drawing of leaves on vellum, one of the cloches is broken...Can you speak to this newest body of work?

JSR) In the *Wish* series, I create glass domiciles that encapsulate life history. They contain maps, architectural plans and rubbings of leaves on vellum. One includes a doily. Each wishbone, made with sinew wrapped around an armature, references the body.

I accidentally broke one of my treasured glass cloche lids as I got ready to send this work to Estevan. At first, it was a small tragedy but then it became a blessing in disguise. *Wish 3* with its broken glass, like my exploded sacs, embraces altered hopes and dreams.

AA) The individual drawings of bones relate to the number of bones in one body. Did you draw these from life? Where did the urge come from to do this series? There is a drawing in this series that remains blank, can you speak to that choice?

JSR) Yes, these drawings are from life. Initially when I started drawing the interior of the body, I used anatomy textbooks and photographs as source material. To expand my scientific observation and to achieve greater authenticity and immediacy in the work, I wanted to draw from life. I contacted an anthropology professor at Brandon University. Through BU's generosity, I was granted permission to draw a female skeletal teaching individual from the anatomical teaching collection at Brandon University's Anthropology Department. With reverence, I drew every bone in that individual's body. It took me sixteen months. In this series, I honour her legacy.

The reason there is one drawing that remains blank is that one vertebra was missing. I chose to draw a grid on the paper to mark the place of the missing vertebra.

AA) Having talked to you in your studio in Brandon, I know some of the pieces relate to your family. Was the notion of family and heritage part of your interest into delving into using ready-mades, such as the doilies and china pieces? I connect these items with things that are passed down between generations but they are also

things that become burdensome in some aspects, often crowding the shelves of second hand shops. What was your interest in the readymade and how is it tied to the other work?

JSR) My search for how to display the rubbings and small sculptures of vintage doorknob and door plate motifs led me to select items from my own family history. I chose my "good" china plates and heirloom doilies to cradle these works about home. These items, like many works in this show celebrate women's domestic and textile traditions.

AA) What are you exploring next in your practice? It seems that you tend to work in series, so will it remain tied to what you have focused on in the past?

JSR) My overarching theme is how we navigate change. While I initially focused on past events, I now highlight the present with topics like the art of aging. For 2020, I've been chosen for a learning partnership through a Manitoba art organization called MAWA (Mentoring Artists for Women's Art) and the Manitoba Neuroscience Network. I am one of seven artists selected to team up with one of seven neuroscientists for a year. My neuroscientist and his team study Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). So, this year I will learn and create art about the brain and FASD. In March 2021, the seven artists will exhibit their work at the Buhler Gallery at Saint Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg. I look forward to the process and where it will lead!

I'll also create work for a group show called "Open Wide" with two other artists about teeth and the societal issues surrounding them.

I delight in partnerships that join the interests of artists with other professions.