

Three moveable walls, assembled into a fractured rectangle to form an altar-like space in the middle of the gallery, divide the IKG exhibition space. Within this niche, the artist's burgeoning foray into ceramics, *Fountain* (2013), is held as a kind of relic. Unglazed, without additional ornamentation beyond the cascading modelled flowers, vines and foliage that are simultaneously blossoming, bloomed, and blown, this 4 × 4 × 5 foot non-functioning fountain becomes a touchstone for the artist's world: one out of time where seasons collapse upon one another, defying cycles of reason in the same way that a single man might inhabit an entire universe. *Fountain* and the related smaller wall-mounted tiles, *Hanging Garden*, were created as part of the artist's residency in ACAD's ceramics department, and points to the possibility of visiting artists bridging the gap between research, production and exhibition. (This was also the case with the recent exhibition by Mark Clintberg, who took advantage of the facilities in ACAD's Fibres Department where he and a group of students, alumni and faculty produced a woven curtain meant to approximate the Polaroid by Daniel Boudinet, long thought to be lost, made famous in Barthes' *Camera Lucida*.)

When I first saw Zachari Logan's work years ago in a group show in Montreal (with Evergon, the beloved "Queen Mother" to a certain segment of Canada's photographic community, as the curator), I was then, as I am now, mostly impressed by Logan's undeniable facility with his pencil. With its emphasis on skill and materiality over other more conceptually oriented contemporary art, I wonder where, in the current climate of art world values, Logan's work "fits." His slow process of meticulous drawing and sculpting stands in stark contrast to the hyper-acceleration of image-making today. So, I consider the attention he has received, and who among us is helping create these opportunities. Beyond Evergon, there has also been filmmaker Noam Gonick, who included the artist's work in a group show in Los Angeles last year, and of course Wayne Baerwaldt, the curator of *Fugitive Garden*. Art historian Edward Lucie-Smith also contributed the introduction to the 2012 eponymous monograph dedicated to Logan's practice. And then there's me... all of us, Logan included, queer. Does this add up to a ghetto? Is there a larger audience for this work? A drawing from

Logan's *Eunuch Tapestry* was recently acquired by the Mendel Art Gallery in his hometown, yet we must still consider the implications of his inclusion. Can an artist so championed by the queer mafia ever break through the lavender ceiling in this country and, for instance, achieve mainstream recognition via such arbiters as the Sobey Art Award? Lucie-Smith argues for Logan's importance by describing an artist "whose work marks a turning point in the effort to establish a definable and intellectually defensible queer aesthetic."

Still, the work itself amounts to a visual feast, in particular if you are keen to admire the beauty of the hunky, nude male form. In further contemplation of myth, perhaps it might be to dissuade his detractors that Logan has been camouflaging his statuesque likeness. We see it hidden amongst the garden or obscured head-to-toe in a veritable net of butterflies (*Emperor's New Clothes*, 2011). It is also transformed through the *Natural Drag* series into a body physically made up of vegetation such as grasses, weeds, flowers and bark (*Green Man*, 2012) or covered in a mosaic of pelts, plumage, scales, claws and other pelage (*Wild Man*, 2012). And finally, the form takes shape as an amalgamation of each mythological possibility (*Lesby*, 2013). In the Mylar drawings from his recent *Wild Man* series, he most successfully transforms his earthly beauty, humourously and grotesquely, into a mythical arrangement that is part human and part creature.

But where to place an artist like Zachari Logan? It seems, perhaps, the perfect place to exhibit this work would be in an academic institution such as ACAD, where students are hungry to see what they are learning put into practice, not only as evidenced in Logan's tremendous skill level, but also in his sound knowledge of art history. Logan's *Eunuch Tapestry* series works, for example, in their precise grandeur, read as close to Neo-Classicism as you can imagine. At this stage it is apparent that no matter who is paying attention to Logan, and by extension where he exhibits, he will continue to develop as an artist of merit; perhaps just outside of time, continuing to occupy mythical worlds of his own making.

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**Amalie Atkins, Brian Cauley,
Kathryn Ruppert-Dazai
and Ellyn Walker: As
Perennial as the Grass
Elora Centre for the Arts,
Elora, ON
Oct. 19 – Dec. 14, 2013
by Penelope Smart**

The Elora Centre for the Arts is a restored, three-storey schoolhouse in the picturesque town of Elora, Ontario. Once filled with school desks and chalkboards, its multitude of airy, inviting rooms now provide space for community programming: a children's ballet studio, a pottery workshop and central

areas for seasonal craft fairs and local art shows. Recently, this out-of-the-way limestone building has also become a new home to exhibitions of contemporary art.

In a serious bid to bring in outside talent, the Centre launched the Middlebrook Prize for Young Canadian Curators last year. The winner of the inaugural national competition was Toronto-based curator Katherine Dennis, who in turn curated *As Perennial as the Grass*, a thoughtful and restrained group exhibition about love.

As the saying goes, “the opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference.”¹ Attempting to eschew sarcasm and irreverence, Dennis brought together four Canadian artists under a line of verse from the famous prose poem *Desiderata* (1927) by poet and writer Max Ehrmann: “Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is as perennial as the grass.” It’s a gravely hopeful statement that finds true love in prosaic, everyday occurrences. For Dennis, works by Ellyn Walker, Kathryn Ruppert-Dazai, Brian Cauley, and Amalie Atkins may be read as evidence that candid and guileless affection exists in the world.² Over the span of two months at the Centre, in a room where large windows spill daylight onto hardwood floors, *As Perennial as the Grass* contended with the uncomfortable idea of full-on earnestness.

Walker’s *Love a garden with all your heart* (2013) aimed at cultivating a kind gesture. In the gallery, a watering can on a plinth sat beside a square garden bed filled with plants. Appearing on the wall next to this meditative set-up was a framed list called “Ideas for a Present Time.” It included humble, near-childlike experiences that one might do in the name of gentleness and simplicity such as “Cut your hair and grow it back, #3” and “Love a Garden with All Your Heart, #7.” A pad of paper on the wall next to this list had been filled with names and dates, indicating that many visitors understood (correctly) that Walker’s piece was, in fact, an invitation to participate in and precipitate a simple act of kindness, such as watering the plants in the owner’s absence. The artist’s manifestation of a “garden,” however, skirted clear-cut naturalness. The raised box of earth filled with lush, newly purchased houseplants appeared, inno-

cently enough, a shade half-hearted.

Large-scale knit and crochet canvases by Ruppert-Dazai were crafty and playful textile “paintings” that covered opposite walls in the gallery. Three works from her *Love Letter Series* (2008–12) contained endearing messages: “I miss and adore you in equal parts;” “You are awesome like a unicorn;” “You’re better than Cy Twombly.” The slogans are fragments of a real-life relationship, words gleaned from love letters exchanged between the artist and her husband. Despite Ruppert-Dazai’s bright, juvenile aesthetic—a clever perversion of a Modernist graffiti style—each note can be read in at least two ways: embarrassingly open and sentimental, or detached and mocking. On the one hand, when it comes to true love, it’s hard to sidestep soppy. On the other hand, it is frustratingly simple to take the artist’s sweet kiss-and-tell intention at face value.

Neighbourhood Messages (2012) by Cauley gave the Elora community at large a chance to pen their own love notes. In the two months leading up to the exhibition, Cauley placed a typewriter under a tree in a local park. Passers-by were able to type their own messages onto old-fashioned parcel tags and hang them in the tree or take existing ones away at will. The notes, according to Dennis, were a curious and popular feature in the park, containing statements such as “things are already okay,” “never give up,” and “I love my family do you.” Later, in the centre of the gallery space, Dennis strung up what was left of the weather-beaten missives, creating a type of delicate paper chandelier. In this resulting text-based installation, how much could be read into the artist’s intent to tap into a small town’s seeming politeness, sense of community, and willingness to participate in contemporary art projects? In the end, Cauley’s collection of ambiguous notes, left hanging, was unobjectionably open-ended.

Adding to the hushed atmosphere of this exhibition was the soft sound of someone learning to play *Edelweiss* on a piano. This music, floating around the other works, was the soundtrack to *Embrace* (2011), a video installation and performance by Atkins. In the video, two elderly twin sisters, dressed in girlish white blouses and red pinafores, walk towards each other on a prairie dirt road. Again and again, they

1 This popular expression derives from the writing of American academic and political activist Elie Wiesel.

2 For a litany of examples of contemporary art dealing in the poetics of day-to-day experiences, see Stephen Johnstone, ed. *The Everyday* (Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2008), part of Whitechapel’s *Documents of Contemporary Art* series.

Amalie Atkins, *Embrace*, 2011, performance and video
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



move toward each other in order to hug in the Austrian tradition: an action where two people place their hands on each other's shoulders and bow to touch foreheads. Atkins allows for some natural false starts, and the women move self-consciously. While such halted movement allows for a sense of the everyday and of awkwardness to creep in for the viewer, there is never a doubt that the sisters will reach each other, or that one will deny the other their greeting. When these women perform this action—so imperfectly—viewers witness a deep, unbroken bond of familial kinship and open connection. A highlight of the exhibition, Atkins' piece displays a type of vulnerability, an intricate bond grown over years and years between two individuals. The piece, projected on a loop on the gallery's back wall, worked to evidence for viewers a naturally flawed expression of closeness and trust. And admittedly—as Dennis shows she is skillfully aware of by including *Embrace* in the exhibit—there is something about a good hug that works to tear apart even the hardest of hearts.

For Dennis, *As Perennial as the Grass* offers works that stand passively against emotional bankruptcy and status quo cynicism, which is a worthwhile starting place for an art exhibition. For visitors to the Elora Centre for the Arts, Dennis' exhibition dealt caringly with a difficult question: when it comes to works of contemporary art that hinge on humane and bare affection, is it possible for viewers to check contempt and doubt at the door?

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Surface Tension **Oakville Galleries at** **Centennial Square,** **Oakville, ON** **Sep. 15–Nov. 17, 2013** by Ben Portis

Upon entering this utilitarian *kunsthalle*, your eyes meet an unusually dim and subdued space. Absent is the conventional wash of floodlights and spotlights hung from an overhead latticework that typically determines the gallery's installation. Instead, illumination mainly emanates from the artworks themselves, most of which feature an integrated lamp of some sort; those which do not bask parasitically in the glow of their neighbours. All of this is by design. The shrouded atmosphere subtly pronounces the material properties of each object, and activates its distinct, discreetly tangible propositions. More precisely, the exhibition examines the persistent, tenacious and appropriative manners with which ephemeral images cling to material surfaces and how this inflects the apprehension of their meaning. Conceived and organized by Jacob Korczynski, *Surface Tension* deftly assembles eight works by seven artists into a convincing demonstration of a persistent longing for and discovery of these haptic qualities in material apparitions—however mutable, transient and accidental those might be. That the works were selected from a diverse spectrum of practices, locations and dates make the premise sturdy and compelling.

Matthew Buckingham's *Image of Absalon to Be Projected Until it Vanishes* (2001) is the earliest work in the show, a continuous 35mm-slide projection of the equestrian statue of Absalon, a 12th-century warrior-bishop and founder of Copenhagen. Shown from behind, with the base cropped out, Absalon is disembodied, floating and fading into a humid sky. As the title suggests, the transparency remains lodged in its obsolete Kodak reliquary for the duration of the exhibition, hypothetically forever, until it physically fades to obliteration. Indeed, an exposure that from the start was over-saturated and indistinct has accumulated a perceptible veil of the dust that churns through the projector, gradually degrading a picture of historical origin and permanence into obscurity over the course of the exhibition, an immaterial shadow of material entropy, a slowly vanishing rider in an empty, immobilized carousel.

Nearby is *Eye Contact* (2005–2006) by Youngmi Chun. All of its elements converge on a minor photographic image dangling by a long strip of masking tape in front of a bare lightbulb. To approach it, you must ascend a treacherously uneven set of brick steps, which undermines your balance and your concentration on the picture. At the apex, craning forward for the closest look, you see an anodyne shot of two children, perhaps brother and sister, posing in the jungle diorama domain of a taxidermied tiger. The effort required to view it belies its significance. Through the reverse of its page, a faint ghost image of a fawn shows through. The picture must have been scanned from a magazine. Printing on translucent Mylar, the artist has pinpricked sightlines from each child's right eye to the eye of the tiger, and the electric light passes intensely through these perforations. This enigmatic ensemble and requisite ritual action parlay Chun's "discourse of private thoughts," that web of secret notions that one imports upon a personal trifle.

Mark Soo's *Monochrome Sunset (English Bay—Oppen-*