

Postcommodity: Time Holds All the Answers

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Québec poet Nicole Brossard's breath in a brown paper bag, forever preserved and distributed, is remarkable.

The show brings together major contemporary Canadian and international artworks in dialogue with the museum's encompassing collection, all under a common theme. At times, this thematic approach, introduced in the wall texts, seems to overshadow the works on view, and distract us from experiencing what they have to offer. However, in contrast, Janet Cardiff's culminating piece, the *Forty-part Motet* (2001), an installation of forty speakers, each playing one of the forty choir voices of "Spem in Alium" (c. 1570), Renaissance composer Thomas Tallis' motet, provides such a strong sense of grounding and listening that it gives us the impetus to start the visit over, this time focusing only on the work.

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Postcommodity: *Time Holds All the Answers*

jake moore

**REMAI MODERN
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Time Holds All the Answers begins with the relations and the lands that form its actuality not its context. This is the largest exhibition to date that Postcommodity has undertaken, the interdisciplinary art collective currently comprised of Kade L. Twist, a member of the Cherokee Nation, and Cristóbal Martínez, Mestizo of Genízaro, Pueblo, Manito, and Chicano heritage. Dr. Gerald McMaster curated and produced the exhibition through his Wapatah Centre for Indigenous Visual Knowledge. McMaster is nēhiyawak and was born on the Red Pheasant Cree Nation Reserve on Treaty 6. These myriad lineages and their connections to land draw a south-north reciprocal motion that begins as conceptual and immaterial reorientation, but like Robert Barry's *Inert Gas Series*, the effects of actions taken are the work itself. The project sutures as many people as places, but it truly could not have happened anywhere but here.

Time Holds All the Answers is not a site-specific exhibition in response to place, rather it is emblematic of Postcommodity's practice as a form of active listening that brings space as material into their work. There is no assumption on their part that a space is fully formed and serves only as a container to hold us, instead their objects and actions amplify every construction of value that each room, building, landform, and vista have accrued over time to multiple generations and cultures. Their practice asserts how acts of erasure have concretized the invisible architectures of these sites to make certain voices harder to hear. Martínez extends this well beyond the human to describe how many of these actions, such as genocide, settler-colonialism, monocultural



agrarian practices, resource extraction, and the military industrial complex among them, have "anaesthetized the land." In this way, the exhibition manifests the vocality of architecture and the volumetric potential of space as sonic but also points to the conditions required for reception well beyond audition.

Time Holds All the Answers ultimately calls all into a refiguration of ceremony. According to Floyd Favel, nēhiyawak artist and founder of the Poundmaker Indigenous Performance Festival, "ceremony is our way of communicating with different worlds that we believe operate simultaneously." The suggestion of simultaneity foregrounds time and refuses the hyper-individuating strategies of modernity in an act of both reorientation and rasquache, or hacking, that together seem akin

Postcommodity. *Let Us Pray For the Water Between Us*, 2020. Installation view, 2021. 2200-gallon polyethylene hazmat chemical storage container, brushless linear motor, leather mallet, wood, steel, aircraft cable, algorithmic composition. Photo: Blaine Campbell.



to Situationist *detournement*, in which existing conditions are brought in and through new methods of experience, allowing space for knowledge unfettered by colonial and other structures that both blind and bind.

The exhibition's point of entry is a work entitled, *Let Us Pray For the Water Between Us* (2020). The piece is assembled from a 2,200-gallon chemical storage container suspended from the ceiling of the building, plus the vista onto the South Saskatchewan River, somehow not fully frozen in -39 degrees Celsius weather. The polyethylene tank is massive and trembles in response to its internal mechanized striker, acting like a metronome or some other timekeeper. This drum both contains and amplifies a beating driver that simultaneously suggests a heartbeat or someone trying to get out. Its sealed black surface is marked with small white scratches from points of contact where the material has been lifted. Saskatchewan farmers will tell you that every farm has a tank like this to hold water, meaning that the object does not contain the implied threat here, but the dislocation of water and its redirected use is key to understanding many of the works. It also marks the recurrent simultaneity of worlds and how what is medicine for some may be perceived as poison for others.

Moving through the museum spaces as a series of volumes, the beat of *Let Us Pray* settles into the body and follows me as I enter a massive gallery seemingly threaded through with colossal beads coloured yellow, blue, white, black, and red—the medicine colours. In actuality, they are stacked 55-gallon drums used to contain waste, which is shipped off Western land masses into storage “elsewhere.” In *South By North Is Also North By South* (2021) the barrels are assembled in the form of a stepped pyramid. It is as though one architectural form has subsumed another or is contained within and is being forced through. The monumental

scale and intention of the Mesoamerican pyramids belie the complex societies that built them; their urbanism, referenced here, is a hint about the fall of an empire. The gridded streets of Teotihuacán and other metropolises are a spatial logic that the four directions guide, making orientation and wayfinding sharable while negating the undulations and interruptions of the land. They are a disciplining structure intended to flatten the earth. This constant reliance on the cardinal points elevated from the land has become aesthetic in the globalization of modernity, giving rise to right angles and the austere geometry of buildings like the Remai Modern.

We are reminded that there is no neutrality in aesthetic concerns. The brightly coloured barrels are coded, each hue indicating their content with level of threat and waste management. The excess of yellow means nuclear and asserts the role of time again. The nuclear era, refigured as mid-century modern, is presented as the true jewel of the exhibition, *Truck Hunting Near Agua Caliente Reservation* (2021). California architect, Donald Wexler's iconic butterfly zigzag roofline, is presented here as a trophy. The roof has been taken off the building like antlers off a buck. Just as the animal's antlers telegraph age and status to their animal kin and when mounted on a wall after their kill that status is transferred to their killers, Postcommodity has taken down the mid-century modern iconography of an architectural style that the military industrial complex has made possible; one that imagined space as unoccupied and demanded the redirection of water to serve those that imagined both displacement and reorientation as rational, good design.

The piece is breathtaking. I was so attracted to this elegant structure suspended in an excess of space, illuminated to replicate its perfection in shadows on the floor. Its seduction is almost overwhelming until one

thinks of the tools of monument making utilized with such precision and skill here. The invisible architectures that hold this roof up are the real material that Postcommodity wants to show us. The work requires deep reflection and asks for your time with its careful composition of space, expert material handling, and full awareness of its location. From the medicine wheel just kilometers away that began Postcommodity's introduction to Gerald McMaster's home territory, to the Remail Modern that KPMB Architects and Architecture49 built on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River, think of the many bodies that laboured to bring this exhibition into being. Its pristine visual clarity is both underscored and interrupted by the constant reminder of the beating drum.

jake moore is an artist that works at the intersections of material, text, and vocality and considers her primary medium to be space. Her dissertation in progress, *Viscous Air*, engages the voice as material in contemporary art and proposes a methodology of listening. Born on Treaty 1 territory, she is currently the director of University Art Galleries and Collections and Assistant Professor in Art & Art History at the University of Saskatchewan located on Treaty 6.

Alexandra Bircken : *Fair Game*

Amélie Laurence Fortin

**KESSELHAUS – KINDL
BERLIN
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15 MAI 2022**

S'introduire dans l'installation monumentale *Fair Game* d'Alexandra Bircken, présentée dans la chaufferie (*Kesselhaus*) du centre pour les arts contemporains KINDL, à Berlin, c'est comme ouvrir la première page d'un polar. Un genre qui a d'ailleurs fait la marque de cette artiste allemande aguerrie formée comme styliste au Central St. Martins College of Art and Design de Londres, au début des années 1990, et qui partage maintenant sa vie et son travail entre les villes de Berlin et de Munich.



Alexandra Bircken, *Fair Game*, 2021. Vue de l'installation. Photo : Jens Ziehe.