

Katherine Boyer, How the Sky Carries the Sun, Art Gallery of Regina

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Katherine Boyer

How the Sky Carries the Sun

Towering over the centre of the room, two large, prism-like wooden structures held a moose-hide vest up by the shoulders. Like wings, the structures pressed down on the ground, lifting up the vest and the beaded prairie landscape and sky on the garment. Gathered around the feet of the installation, puffy boxes made from leather fabric and cotton batting sat open, empty, and crumpled. The blue in the boxes' faux leather fabric resembled the colour of the sky; their puffy shapes suggested clouds.

The mental impression above is of the two works *The Sky Vest and Heavy/Soft* (both 2021) from Katherine Boyer's latest exhibition at the Art Gallery of Regina. Boyer, a Métis/settler multidisciplinary artist, has been making art to explore personal family stories, Métis history, and material culture, as well as how these domains interact, intertwine, and manifest. In the exhibition *How the Sky Carries the Sun*, she examines selfhood as a queer and as a Métis individual, expressing the dichotomy of identity through the repeating symbols of the sun and the sky in a diverse series of works that materially straddle "soft" and "hard."

One work that embodies this concept well is *Memories of the Sundogs Herd* (2021). The work comprises a series of lightboxes mounted on sheets of OSB plywood. Boyer considers these eighteen light boxes, arranged like an altar with two smaller wooden wings flanking the large panel, autobiographical. Reflecting on familial connection to and memory of Souris Valley, Saskatchewan, Boyer recreated sundogs—a special prairie winter weather event. Called "parhelion" by meteorologists, the natural optical phenomenon is created when sunlight is refracted through ice crystals in the air, creating a bright ring around the sun. To achieve a similar effect, Boyer applied UV coating to the lightbox surfaces; as the viewer moved and changed viewpoint, the installation would glister a spectrum of pastel hues.

The effect of fleeting illusion suggests not only identity ambiguity but the undulating process of self-discovery that other works in the exhibition also explore. *Queer Hometown Horizon* (2021) features a long bright-yellow hooked rug above an OSB crate to abstractly depict the sky of Boyer's hometown; in *The harder I work, the less I exist, the more I become the work: the closed line* (2021), knotted clothesline and willow root displayed on two plywood crates playfully represent her process of either completing an idea or confusing herself—"tying yourself in knots." In conversation, the two works speak to her efforts at *queering* the circumstances she grew up in, and to the laboriousness of existing ambiguously. The OSB crates serve both as platforms and as a reminder of transience. In fine-art and museum contexts, wooden crates are seen in gallery spaces only during transitory periods.

Boyer's inclusion of bare materials as integral parts of many works in the exhibition contributes to an understanding of her connections with material culture and, to a larger extent, with nature. The exhibition title can therefore also serve as a rhetorical call for both artists and viewers to examine our relations with phenomena and memories around us. As we recall these experiences, our perceptions of the world—and of ourselves within it—begin to merge into a shimmering composite of fleeting imprints from our memory.

Tak Pham

Art Gallery of Regina
January 13—March 13, 2022

Katherine Boyer
How the Sky Carries the Sun, exhibition view, 2022.

The Sky Vest (detail), 2021–2022, installation view, 2022.

Photos : Don Hall