

# Exhibit showcases art with view from diverse communities



Tom Morrison

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Artwork from the contact landing(s) exhibit will be on display at the Thames Art Gallery in Chatham until Sept. 16. Tom Morrison/Postmedia Network

The new exhibition at the Thames Art Gallery takes a look at how the landscapes and histories of Chatham-Kent and elsewhere in Ontario are viewed by diverse communities through several distinct pieces of artwork.

The collection, called contact landing(s), was curated by Elynn Walker, a Queen's University PhD candidate in cultural studies who has traveled to the Chatham area over the last five years for her research.

Art gallery curator Pamela Edmonds said most of the artwork finds the artists engaging with either the local community or their own personal histories and "how they relate to land, the built environment and then actual environment.

"It's not only about contact landings, but about these different contact zones between borders, between water and land and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous settler histories," she said.

One of the artists, Vanessa Dion Fletcher, is from Toronto but has roots nearby in Moraviantown, said Edmonds. For her piece, she made copper plates to wear in place of shoes and walked in Moraviantown, Toronto and Nunavut.

Dion Fletcher then made prints based on the shapes the plates took after her walks.

"Instead of using European tools or artistic tools, she used her own body to write on these plates through the landscape," said Edmonds.

"They (the plates) kind of look like little sleds and that's a reference to stories about her grandmother who used to pull groceries on a sled when she was traveling through the reserve in the winter time."

A collaborative work between Teresa Carlesmo and Michael DiRisio contrasts the "idealized image" of the Thames River in London, England, "which is this beautiful blue, azure," with the muddy and green look of the Thames River in Ontario, said Edmonds.

For her part, Walker made a collage of documents – many of which are newspaper clippings – related to Chatham-Kent's history, including its role in the Underground Railroad.

Walker said digging into archives often challenges the dominant narratives and with Chatham-Kent, being a place of freedom with stops on the Underground Railroad isn't the whole story.

"It was also a place ... of racism and of dispossession, not just against black people, but against indigenous people, against all different kinds of immigrants," she said. "Looking at different archives exposes multiple stories that we have to hold and contest."

The program to the exhibition also looks at some land disputes in Chatham-Kent and surrounding areas, including those involving the Caldwell First Nation and the North Buxton Community Church.

Photographer Abdi Osman's work includes images of black members of the LGBTQ community shown within different heritage sites in Toronto.

"It's kind of a reflection on them being placed within these kind of cultivated or colonial landscapes, but just out and about and doing their own thing, but integrating, making visible those black queer folks in Canada who are often not represented in a lot of contemporary art," said Edmonds.

A photograph from Morris Lum shows the inside of a Chinese Freemasons building in Toronto. Edmonds said it is about "this gathering of Chinese culture within Canada" and features references to both Chinese and Canadian culture.

Jalani Morgan created a bat sourced from wood from the local area in honour of Earl "Flat" Chase from the Chatham Coloured All-Stars baseball team

Edmonds said the way the bat is presented in the gallery is similar to how an object would be displayed at a Baseball Hall of Fame.

Sandra Brewster's piece relates to the Junction area of Toronto and is part of her "Smiths" series, which features figures drawn directly on the wall with "almost a ghost-like presence," said Edmonds. The series is meant to recognize different immigrant populations of black Canadians, she said.

The exhibit also includes video works from **Skawennati**, Felix Kalmenson and the team of Ryan Ferko, Faraz Anoushahpour and Parastoo Anoushahpour.

Zoe Hayn-Jones submitted an interactive workshop where guests can fill in maps of the Chatham-Kent area with their personal relationships to the land. The maps are then displayed on the wall.

Pennants bearing the words of a Chicano labour activist named Carlos Cortez Koyokuikatl hang above all of these artworks. They were created by Dylan Miner, a Metis artist from Michigan.

Walker said while Miner is the only artist in the exhibition who would identify as an activist, the other pieces of art can also challenge traditional ways of thinking.

"These difficult conversations of belonging and occupation and territory and reconciliation are things we all have to talk about," she said.

The exhibition will stay at the art gallery until Sept. 16.

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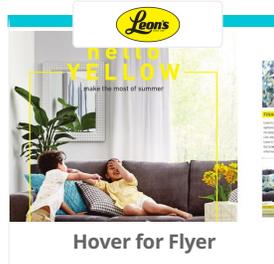
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