



FILMIC

The
IRIS
Group



A collective of women artists

SG
station gallery

FILMIC

Presented by
The Iris Group
and
Station Gallery

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Olexander Wlasenko, Curator



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FILMIC

Rowena Dykins

Laura M. Hair

Judith A. Mason

Holly McClellan

Mary Ellen McQuay

Margaret Rodgers

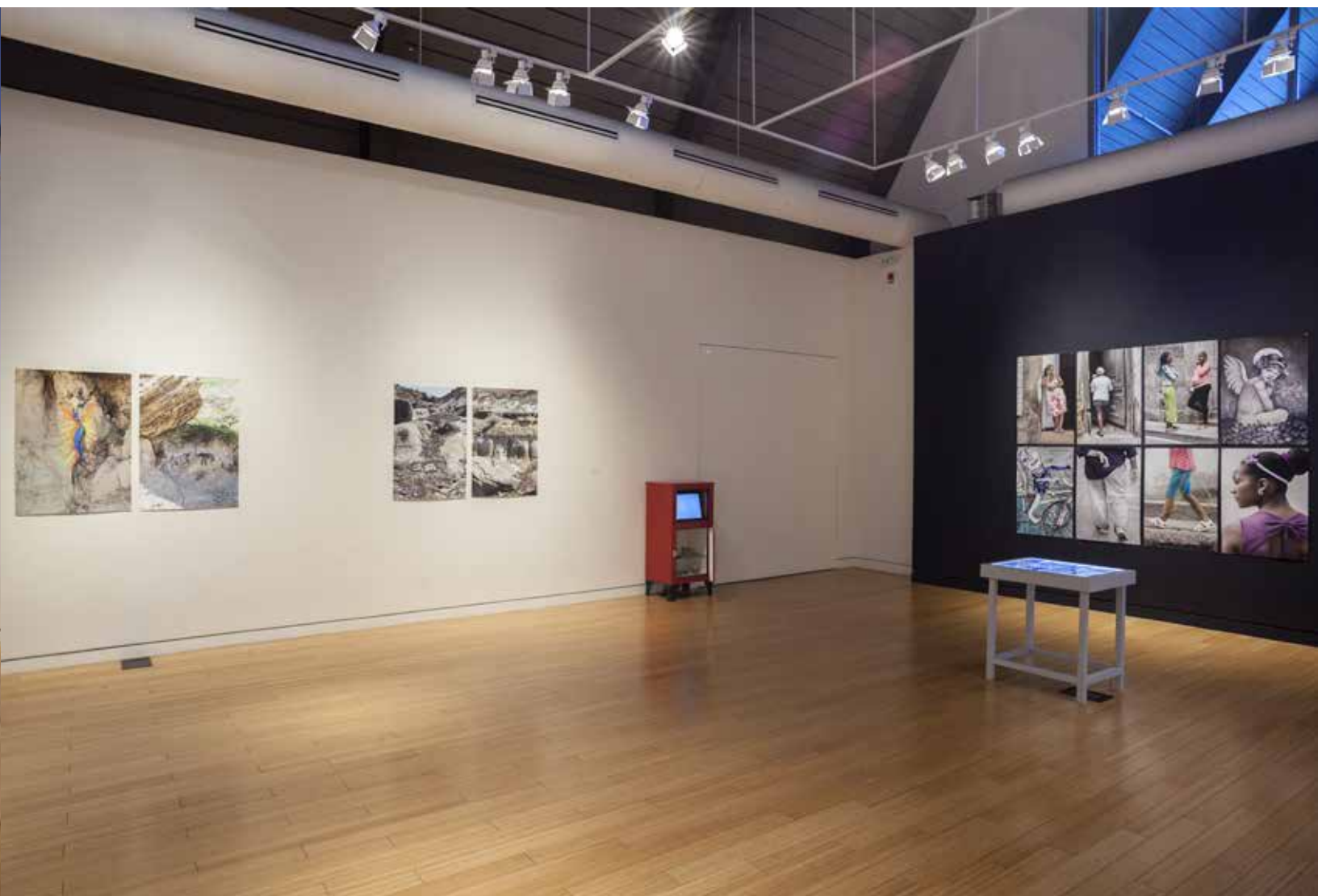
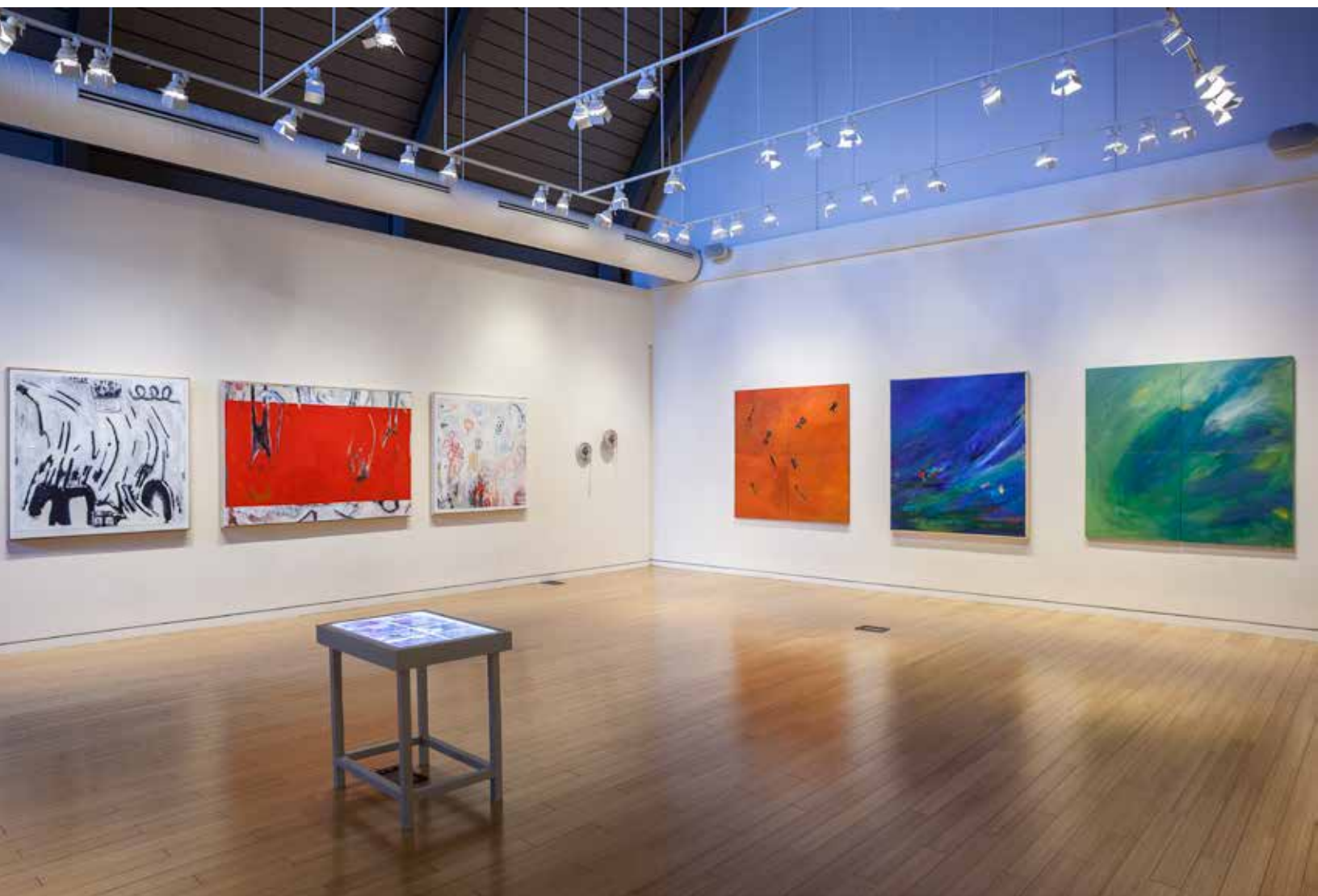
Janice Taylor-Prebble

Sally Thurlow

Wendy Wallace

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Her Pious Grit

THROUGH TEAR-STAINED LENSES, Nana watches the lithe heroine mouth her final words on silent screen. The lyrical and prophetic tableau from Godard's 1962 *Vivre sa vie* stands as a milestone not only in *nouvelle vague* cinema but in the history of film. We watch the watcher watching—we see Godard's Nana, who sees Dreyer's Joan of Arc. The white text on black background fades. It reads: "La mort." But this is only the beginning.

The meta-cinema moment (that is, film *about* film) in Godard's work interfaces with vectors and themes explored in *FILMIC*. This exhibition is an aggregate response to mediumistic, technological and emotive shifts and the implications of such intersections.¹ This project straddles the 20th and 21st centuries, analogue and digital, personal and collective, familial and societal, corporeal and ethereal, experiential or inherited perspectives. The conceptual content of *FILMIC* rests, however, between the places where binaries elide. The women, who have created the works in this exhibition, have left an artistic trace between two or more end points. At times these vestiges infer storytelling, human communications, genetics, history and the eternal now. Each member of the collective brings to the fore rudimentary and intimate voice to a broader spectrum of modern spectacle. Familial, archival, nostalgic, subjective and objective stances run the course of this exhibition.

The original idea for the exhibition evolved out of conversations about chilled canisters of developed and undeveloped 35mm film rolls preserved in perpetuity. This notion of preserving image artefacts from the pre-digital age enters this exhibition and extends to other ideas of the word "filmic". The adjective can relate to movies or cinematography. Here too conversations about covers and layers enter the dialogue. A brief glimpse into the studio production of the nine group members, demonstrates points of proxemics and divergence weaving through the fabric of *FILMIC*.

In her search for what connects or changes us, Dykins uses camera film, dremel markings and paint to represent chromosomes and genes. In *Margaret's Amber I and II*, Hair combines trailing columns of negative strips and her distinctive portraiture to create a dialogue between memory and form. Working from a psychological perspective, Mason's *Projection* is a series of paintings that connect to ideas of projection in a psychic and literal sense and 'screens' as projected surfaces. McClellan has created a light-box installation using found negatives from pictures taken in 1940-50. In *Angels in Havana* McQuay presents a narrative of women behind a screen so to speak, photographed one year prior to negotiations to lift the US trade embargo. An accompanying light-box with digital negatives is titled *Digital Messengers*. Rodgers' *Bigfootage* is a 24 foot filmstrip parody that addresses issues relating to systems of belief, conspiracy theories, and film as illusion. Taylor Prebble's *Do You Measure Up?* relates to prevalent female imagery in her depiction of a dance sequence, and in an investigation of worksite discrimination. Thurlow's *Old World View* is a sculptural installation using suspended filmstrips from the 1960s, a commentary on the cultural notions in play in our educational system at the time. In *Existence*, Wallace houses a motion sensor photography loop and still photographs.

In this group exhibition we find an array of material investigations into the nature of place, particularly an expanded notion of liminal space. One of the major themes running through contemporary art proposes the re-evaluation of geographical positioning to the body/subject. The potentials of this tensile relationship are outlined by the French thinker, Michel Foucault. He writes, "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of far and near, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed."² Indeed, in this exhibition we can feel the elastic tension between the nature of place and how we relate to it. The participants of *FILMIC* contribute an articulate voice to this lively discourse through a gamut of material production. In this exhibition we find all that is variable and synchronous, complimentary and diverse, in the field of contemporary visual culture.

Olexander Wlasenko

¹ Ed Krčma, "Cinematic Drawing in a Digital Age" *Tate Papers* Issue 14 (October, 2010).

² Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. J. Miskowiec, in *Diacritics* (Spring, 1986) 22

Rowena Dykins

Dykins lives and works in her lakeside studio in North Kawartha, where she creates her large installations and paintings. Her process combines colour, spontaneity of gesture and a constant re-working of the surface. Her series of new paintings for *FILMIC*, *The DNA Dance*, is part of a larger series on loss and love.

"Dykins has chosen to use strips of film to represent the building blocks of life; the mitochondria, that spills one life one way and another the other... the spiraling double helix of DNA is akin to two entwined strands of film, Kodachrome chromosomes...The media of film imitates the movements and patterns of Nature."

Will McGuirk Slowcityzine.

Dykins, in her own words: "I was painting at a residency on Toronto Island called ARTscape where I decided to dedicate a painting to my mother who had recently passed away. I imagined an 'art gene' as we both loved painting. My family constantly inspires me as they are all extremely creative, especially my seven year old grandson who has a genetic disorder called Cystic Fibroses and expresses so much through dance, music and painting,"

The first painting contains pieces of film representing chromosomes – single and double – from parents to offspring, and the DNA containing the specific instructions that makes each of us unique.

In the second painting Dykins has painted a dance of DNA in a sea of colour.

The third painting goes into pure lyrical abstraction and for Dykins, a sense of mourning.



Laura M. Hair

Hair is a founding member of IRIS, who works as an exhibiting artist/educator at various public galleries and educational institutions. <https://sites.google.com/site/artlmh/>

The original concept for *FILMIC* developed during an IRIS Group discussion of 'fridge film', all those rolls of 35mm that we, at one time, or still do, store in our fridge. From this, Laura started collecting the developed film, the family negatives stashed in boxes, cupboards, and drawers, to fashion a particular photo album.



Merged identities with shifting and bisecting stratifications of information are central to Hair's established art practice, in which she utilizes a variety of substrates. Directional changes in art technologies often encourage counter technological movements. Incorporating the plastic, negative format, now a remnant from an earlier photographic process, is a natural extension of Laura's methodology. The dichotomy between the amber-coloured negative, a relatively new, man-made product, and an heirloom, Baltic amber necklace, of ancient, organic matter, uniquely bound by their colour and familial ties, is explored in a multi-paneled installation. The collected and assembled negative strips are fashioned into trailing, coiling columns that form two curtains. These filmic layers partially reveal, partially conceal and are physical obstructions comparable to the emotional divide of memory loss. The drawn portraits of the artist's mother and grandmother on the second panels are fully recognized when the viewer moves away from the curtains and sees beyond the barrier of memories. On the third panels, glimpses of the projected, distorted portraits, representing our selected recollections can be seen.

Appreciation of the changing roles and interdependencies of the parent and child offers fulfillment in the relationships' mature stage. However, it is sorrowful when one member of this connection recedes and the other has to walk away, the binding threads of parenthood now forgotten or relinquished. *Margaret's Amber I and II* is an amber encased homage to Hair's mother and grandmother, united in time, before they were mothers, before they forgot they were mothers. Here, the artist professes her admiration and respect for the individual women they were, to lessen the yearning of the walk away.



Judith A. Mason

Mason is an interdisciplinary artist, curator and arts educator. In *Projection* she investigates inner psychological experience and its collective manifestations.

Projection explores the relationship between the disowned parts of ourselves and the images we culturally construct and obsessively project on screens that manifest these infantile wishes and desires. Walter Benjamin wrote in his 1935 essay *The Work of Art and the Mechanical Means of Reproduction* that film would become the dominant art form of our time. He was right. Moving pictures that mirror bits and pieces of our lives, but do so in a space of projected fantasy, have an immense contemporary allure. My artistic practice deals with psychic life - events that traumatize; experiences of loss, mourning, rage, love and ubiquitous fear.

Brony Fer in her book *On Abstract Art* suggests abstract painting as a site of fantasy. My experience as an abstract painter supports her thesis. My paintings revealed to me that abstract painting explores and configures relationships and one's inner life – the psyche – rather than issues of place and belonging as pictured in traditional narrative European landscape painting.

Freud's discussion of the dream work in *Interpretation of Dreams* advances the idea that projection and transference are two of a number of different mechanisms that protect a dreamer's psyche from dangerous or disturbing impulses, thoughts and feelings. Putting these thoughts together, along with my current addiction of Netflix (Get Fix) and the fact that our time spent looking at screens is increasing exponentially, I began to wonder if this proliferation of screen images are a cultural playing out of the Freudian notion of psychological projection.

Projection stages the pictorial surface as a site of projected fantasy – as three screens. The first black and white painting/screen deals with the computer, its edges are curved and the canvas is glued to a wooden board. The second larger painting

is a Netflix screen with images barely suppressed underneath its surface. The third painting is the screen of my



childhood – the now old-fashioned projection screen that one set up in real space and time. The edges of this painting/screen are squarely cut. Two film reels are attached to the wall, each film cut up strips of abstract paintings and sewn together – films of my life.

I wonder, why in this time and place is our culture manifesting projections on screens as the predominant art form? What is the underlying agenda (s) to moving us further and further down the path of disembodied experience? And most importantly perhaps, how does this further and support the agendas of the dominant power holders in our culture?



Holly McClellan

McClellan is a photo-based artist and educator. Most of her artwork is influenced by consumerism and the relationship to the environment.

My work for *FILMIC* connects my interest in consumerism and photography, using found images that resonate with North Americans who lived in the earlier and mid parts of the 20th century. The substrate used for the work, the sizing of images, the merging of old analog and newer digital technologies, act as a reference to photographic practices of the past, present and future. Several photographic methods have or are soon scheduled to completely disappear with the digital age.

The negatives were purchased for \$3 at a small thrift shop in Lindsay, Ontario with a handwritten price tag and a label on the envelope "*Military Negatives*". During checkout the shopkeeper said he wasn't exactly sure what to call them or where they came from.

There are no combat images.

The collection of negatives, appear to be someone's personal record keeping during military and naval training. The negatives appear to have come from the same camera but most likely the camera was shared. The images read as snapshots of a family home, life on the base, training, group and personal excursions. Clues about the time period are in the shape of the negatives themselves and the scenes recorded. The posing in family pictures is typical for the era. When viewing the collection as a whole or if focusing on a single image, fragmented stories are told as the people in the photos start to become characters and the backgrounds begin to look like sets. As the artist, the unanswered question lingers how these memories ended up as cheap product.

While they were labeled "*Military Negatives*" the images appear to be just as much about someone's adventures with the medium of photography as they are about recording personal history. All the tech errors during capture and processing, the experiments with composition and design are part of the narrative. While the medium of photography is ever evolving, the process and learning curves of mastering camera gear, photographic composition and the need to tell stories through still images, continue to stay the same.



Mary Ellen McQuay

McQuay's photo based work has been exhibited widely, included in many collections, published in books and magazines and won national and international awards.

Wandering is central to my work. In Cuba I left the main thoroughfares of Havana abuzz with humanity and wandered the quieter side streets of Old Havana where movement is measured and gestures are slow.

Street photography has always been central to photography and one that I often practice. When a stranger and I make eye contact, I point to my camera and lift it to my eye. Often my subject will be looking back at me through my camera lens. The physicality of the lens of my eye connecting to the lens of their eye through my camera lens gives us a moment of intimacy. Though my subject may look away after our eyes met we have shared an instant of closeness and my new friend trusts their gestures and body language to me.

Angels in Havana is a series of photographs of women and girls I met on the street; some seeming to wait for their future to unfold and some contemplative with a palpable tinge of yearning. Of my eight photographs, two are details from large street murals created by Cuban artists.

Digital Messengers, are inversions of the digital positives and are a link to the film negatives I developed by hand in my darkroom not long ago. While the shift from analog to digital may seem sweeping, both hold clues to the interpretation of the final image.

I made *Angels in Havana* a year before negotiations to lift the 55 year old US embargo against Cuba began. May the women in my images benefit from the economic changes to come and not experience the income disparity that exists in North America today.



Margaret Rodgers

Rodgers is a visual artist and writer, founder of IRIS, former art teacher at Durham and Centennial Colleges, and past Director/Curator at VAC Clarington. <http://www.margaretrodgers.ca>

*Your heart's desire is to be told some mystery. The mystery is that there is no mystery. **

Bigfootage addresses issues relating to systems of belief, conspiracy theories, film as illusion. It is intended to be a shift and destabilization of the idea of film and its delivery mechanisms, in the manner in which they mimic reality. My *FILMIC* project addresses an issue surrounding the nature of film, that of its malleability of reality, so effective that it is mistaken for reality. I am focusing on images derived from so-called actual footage of an enormous and elusive (mythical) creature variously named Bigfoot, Sasquatch, Yeti, depending on location, language or culture.

The juxtaposition of translucent silk and black plastic is used to affect a similarity to filmstrip material while maintaining a parodical viewpoint. The use of silt cloth is a continuation of previous series where silt cloth banners were suspended from acrylic rods by fishing line filament. Here the fabric becomes the frame for images transferred on silk organza, suggestive of both the luxury of silk and the basest of industrial material, authentic and inauthentic as either documentation or fine art.

*The Judge speaking in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, p 206.



Janice Taylor-Prebble

With a focus on printmaking and painting, Taylor-Prebble, discusses reflected human interactions. A graduate of Georgian College and OCAD + Florence, she is also a licensed electrician and has exhibited widely.

What we see on film (representative of all media) is often a measuring device for what we think and feel about ourselves. We have become FILMIC.

Whitewashed

The photographic images incorporated into a series of eight works which hang like film frames, curling up at the edges, were taken when her adopted daughter was six, loving her body and creating a dance. Years later, she watched the same girl, now a teen, perform a different dance to try to change herself to be like the skinny girls; watched her try to change her Afro-American body type, starving herself and exercising to be thin enough to reflect what was considered beautiful. In one summer she lost 80 lbs. It made her more accepted – briefly.

Do You Measure Up?

Continuing with the artist's conception of filmic, this time using a very literal measuring device, the measure tape, and film and spool from a Super 8 projector, the similarities are explored: the tape like film, and tape coming off a spool, like film off a reel.

The two are grafted together in the series *Do You Measure Up?* The first, *Do You Measure Up? 6 inches Does it*, began merely as a representation of the male psyche under filmic.

After witnessing a sexual harassment incident at work she was called in to the investigation. Just before the meeting, a male co-worker offered her "a piece of his tape measure", which many outside the construction industry would not understand. However, there, a tape measure is a common penis metaphor. One can observe that men play with tape measures, pull them in and out imitating masturbation, holding them up like an erect penis. They joke about the length of theirs compared to others. That she was being sexually threatened on the way to an investigation of sexual harassment of the only other female worker on site, was very disturbing. *Do You Measure Up? 6 inches Does it*, held this second and twisted meaning for her.

Taylor-Prebble created a piece *Do You Measure Up? Did a Woman Speak?* to describe her feelings of vulnerability as a female in that environment. Even after the resolution of the harassment incident, some men on the job continued to insult. The image itself a tape measure wrapped around a thin wrist, without explanation, seemed to refer merely back to skinny girls (*Whitewashed*).

Do You Measure Up? Oh boy plays with the shape of the film spool, but as well refers to the filmic pressure of having a great rack.



Whitewashed (1 to 8) 2015

etching on paper with collage & paint

Do You Measure Up? 2015

1 "Funny Enough" 2 "Six Inches Does it" 3 "Oh boy" 4 "Did a woman speak?" collage and paint

Sally Thurlow

Sally Thurlow is a multi-disciplinary artist with a Fine Arts BA from the University of Toronto. Her work is held in private collections across Canada, and at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery. She is also a member of The Red Head Gallery in Toronto.

Questioning our cultural and environmental practises are a constant in my work, leading me to collect recyclable materials, thereby making art from many different sources. The idea of the *FILMIC* project excited me immediately as I have been holding on to these educational film strips from the 1960's that my daughter pulled out of the garbage at her high school years ago. Stacked in my studio, they have been waiting to see the light – literally! I hadn't been a history buff but when I look at these pictures, they are from my time growing up and I remember this whirlwind of messages about the state of the world at that time. The Cold War, nuclear power, (hide under your desk!) an environmental awareness beginning, our neighbours south – looming large in military actions, race revolution and many other ways, Russia's prowess, the burgeoning awareness of exotic cultures and so on were all part of the daily news as I grew up.

Here I have put the news and views all together as a world's overview à la Nadar's hot air balloon. In the tapes and vinyls that go with the filmstrips, the reporting is mostly from a US point of view. Giving just a taste of each to hear allows us to time travel back. For a Canadian flavour there are Native and Pioneer strips also made in the USA...

The different colours of the film strips and the juxtaposition of wildly disparate subjects and time lines allow us to see how we absorb so much rich information, overlapping and blurring the lines of reality.



Wendy Wallace

Wendy Wallace is a visual artist and educator with the Durham District School Board, a U of T, Banff Centre and UOIT alumna. She has been exploring the Badlands from Alberta to Montana for the past three summers.

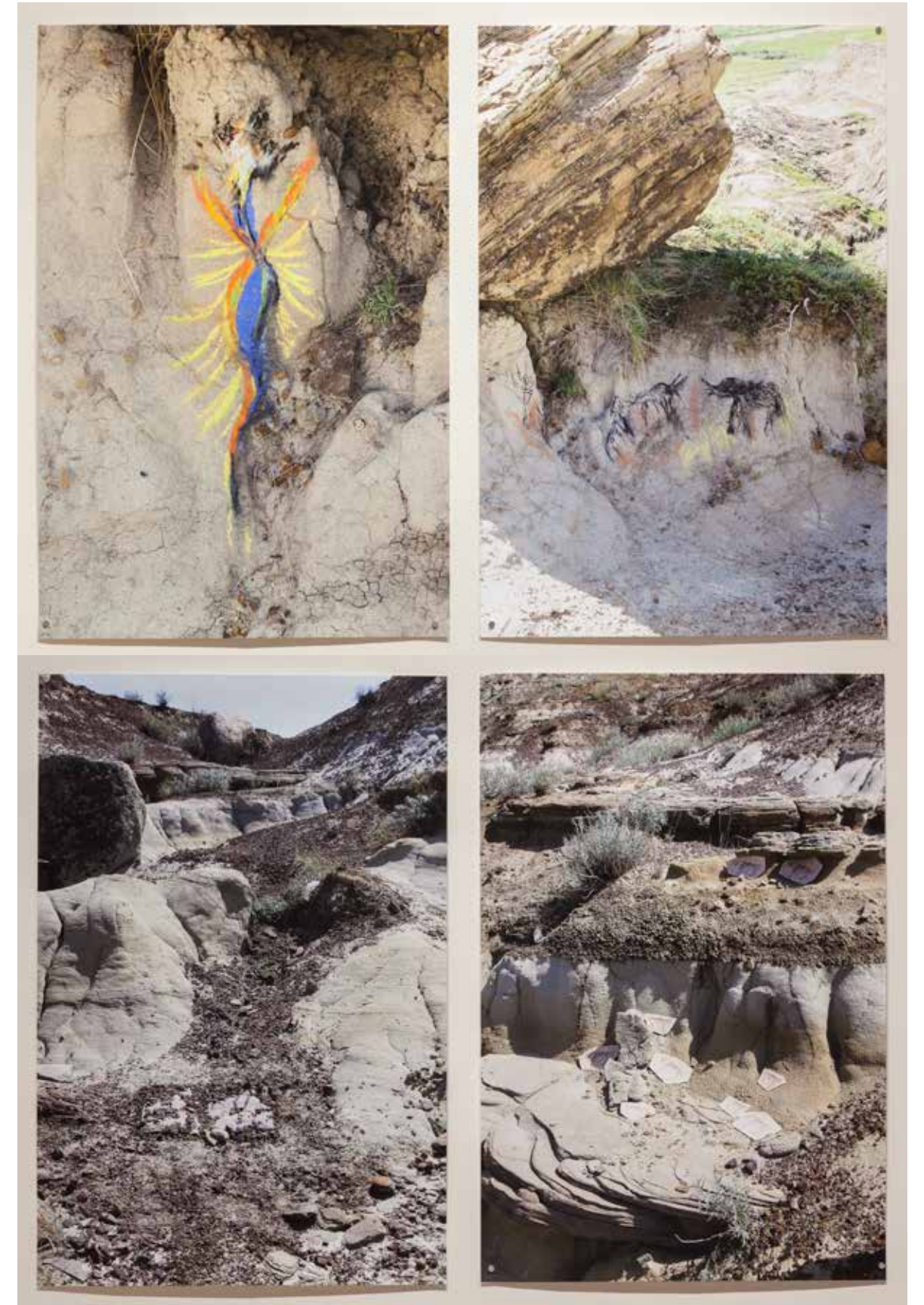
The premise surrounding the *FILMIC* exhibition for the IRIS Group was to expand upon the concept, "what to do with the 35 mm film in our refrigerator or negatives stored away, pictures of people and places from the past".

I connected my work to the exhibition with images of drawings and photographs I created on site in the Badlands of Alberta, north of Drumheller, in Horse Thief Canyon.

They are documented archetypes that then dissolve, washed or blown away by wind and rain or covered with rock. The couplings of the two pairs of photographs are documentations of work in the same location one year apart. The drawings and photographed sculpture are images reflecting past creatures lying beneath the layers of sedimentary rock.

I inserted a digital photo frame in a 1940's icebox. Responding to the location of many fossils buried and preserved in ice, as well as the initial premise of the exhibition, I chose this area to display videos and stop motion film of the body of work *Existence Alien in Alberta*.

In the lower cooler section I placed fossils of Mammoth vertebrae, dinosaur bones, 300-year-old caribou vertebra and petrified wood, drawing comparisons between the preservation of food and artefacts.



Alien in Alberta 2015

(from the *Existence* series)

inkjet print, video, ice-box, fossils

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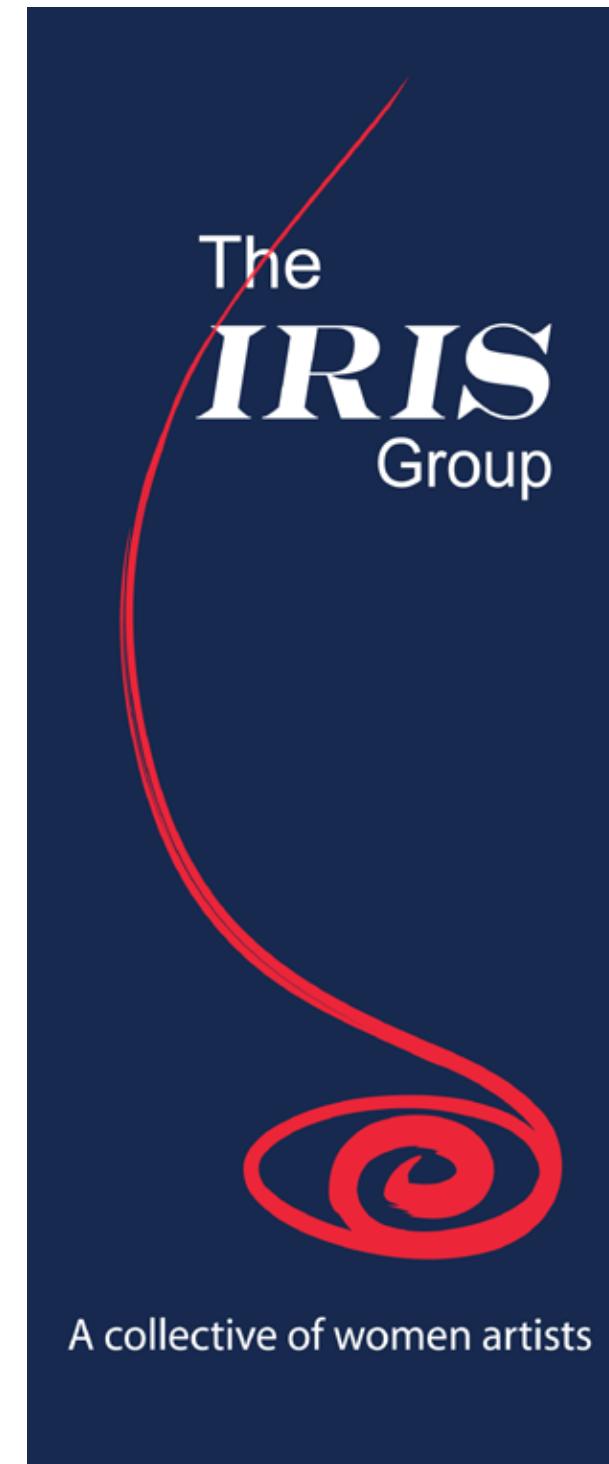
Photography:

Jean Michel Komarnicki (pages 2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23)

Mary Ellen McQuay (pages 6, 7, 9, 14)

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The IRIS Group, a collective of women artists, began in 1996 as a forum to share ideas, offer mutual support, and develop projects that further the overall intentions of the group. Based in Durham Region, IRIS has exhibited work and mounted outreach projects in galleries and on campuses in Ontario, Alberta, New York State and Mexico. IRIS is a member of CARFAC Ontario.



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