

Projections



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Sarah Ammons
Dani Crosby
Conan Masterson
at The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington
March 13 – April 10, 2016

By **James Campbell**
Executive Director/Curator

Introduction

Young or “*Emerging*” artists have long been a defined priority group within the funding parameters of the Ontario Arts Council. The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington has embraced this priority through numerous past exhibitions and educational programming. We take pride in offering a professional venue for the exhibition and documentation of the vision of diverse artists in the early stages of their creative evolution. This was achieved with dynamic and engaging results in the exhibition, *Projections*, in the late winter and early spring of 2016.

Prominent Clarington based artist, teacher and curator, Todd Tremeer, has a long and positive history with the VAC as exhibiting artist and visual arts instructor. Serving as guest curator for this exhibition, he brought together recent work from three young women artists, Sarah Ammons, Dani Crosby and Conan Masterson, utilizing all three of our gallery spaces to celebrate their individual vision. Interestingly, none had met prior to this experience. As explored in Tremeer’s essay that follows, a compelling fusion resulted within the spaces of a 1905 Mill.

I wish to thank and congratulate all three artists for their passion, courage, and sustained commitment to their work. The VAC is proud to have hosted one of many exhibitions yet to come for each of you. Hearty thanks as well

2 to Todd Tremeer, who brought this exhibition to fruition with professionalism, sensitivity, and a genuine zeal for the artists and their work. Warm thanks as always for the ongoing support of The Municipality of Clarington, The Ontario Arts Council, The Ontario Trillium Foundation, The Rotary Club of Bowmanville, our numerous corporate and private supporters, and our loyal membership.

Projecting Views

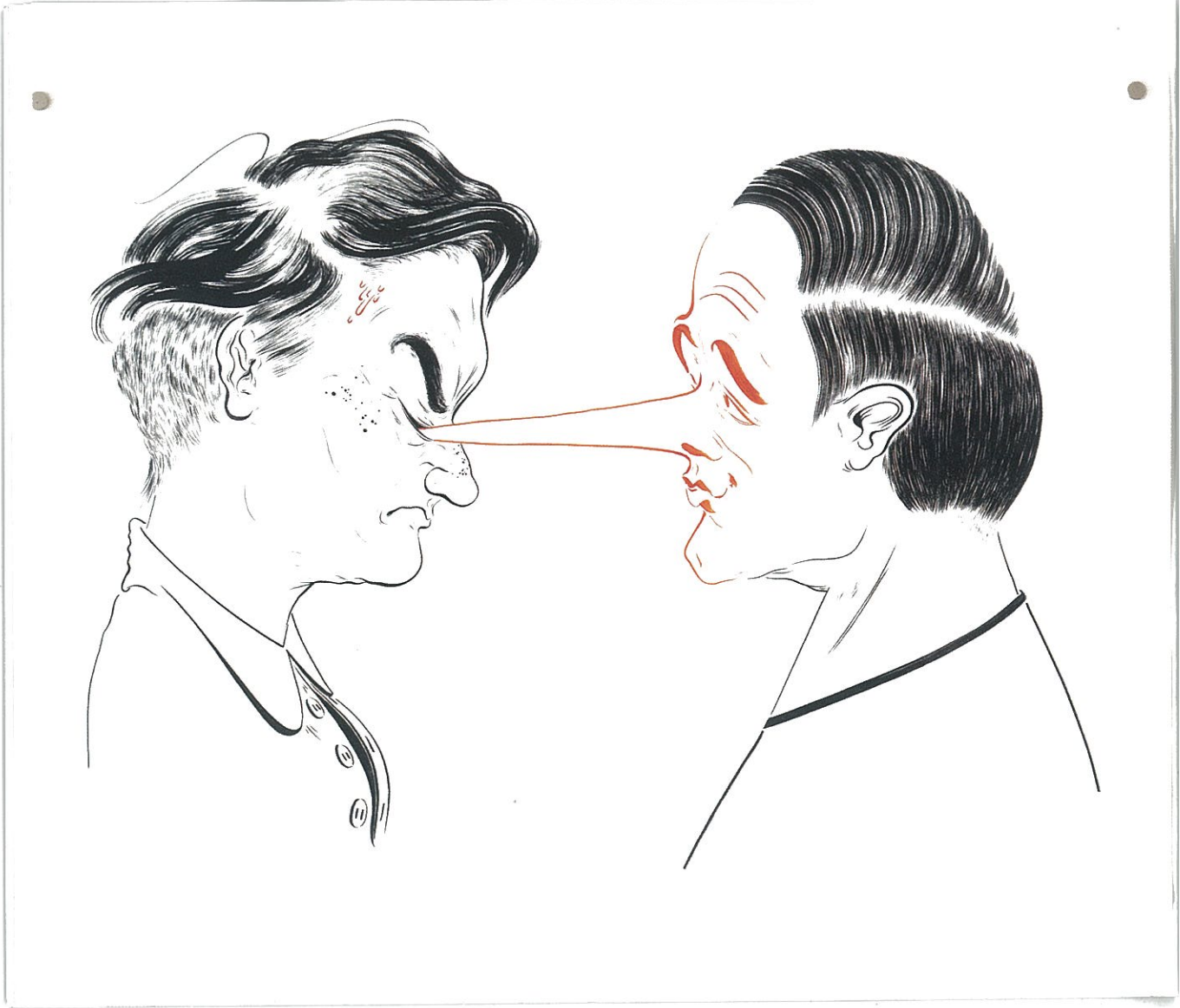
By **Todd Tremeer**
Exhibition Curator

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A drawing by Dani Crosby shows a man with a nose like Pinocchio's. His long nose "projects" across the page and pokes the eye of another figure. A sculpture by Conan Masterson sits on a white pedestal. It features a rotating metal tube protruding from an artificial plant. A small electric motor animates this contraption, fills the gallery space with ambient mechanical noise and suspended above it all, tufts of light green plastic drift and sparkle in the gallery air currents. Paintings by Sarah Ammons are rendered with pencil, watercolour and gouache on delicate cream coloured paper. Her paintings depict people engaged in seemingly mundane activities. At times, two or three small works on paper are framed together, suggesting different elements or moments within a narrative sequence.

"Projection" is illustrated in Crosby's Pinocchio drawing. In Masterson's work, "projecting" describes the metal tube in her assemblage sculpture. Finally, viewers "project" narratives when they piece together and interpret Ammons' fragmented images. The word "projection" thus infers something speculative, emerging, predictive or exploratory. As an exhibition title, *Projections* serves to frame the creative trajectory of three emerging artists. All have completed post-secondary studies in visual art, exhibit professionally and are producing conceptually engaging work, informed by art's past and contemporary sensibilities.

Sarah Ammons lived in Bowmanville before leaving to study art and art history at Queen's University. She recently completed her Master of Fine Arts degree at the San Francisco Art Institute. She continues to live in the San Francisco Bay area. She has exhibited in the United States and Canada. Dani Crosby began her art studies locally at Durham College and later graduated from Sheridan College's illustration program. She is an active participant

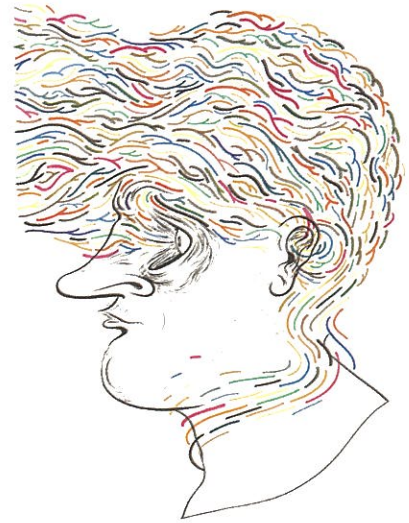
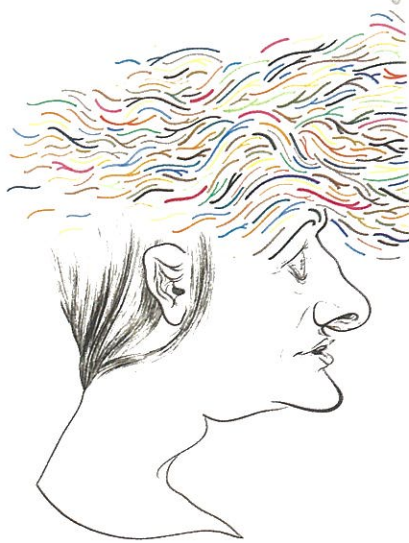


in Oshawa's art scene and currently teaches drawing and painting at Durham College. Conan Masterson originates from Montreal where she studied art at Concordia University. She has since completed a Master of Fine Arts at Western University. She currently lives in London, Ontario and has exhibited across Canada. As a side note, Sarah took children's painting classes here at the Visual Arts Centre (VAC) as a school-aged child. Also, Dani showcased selected student drawings as a Durham College student. Thus, this group exhibition is something of a homecoming for two local artists, while also the first formal exhibition of these three young women here at the mill.

Dani Crosby's drawings are memorable for their crisp, calligraphic, illustrative lines. A few coloured lines and the occasional cream paper punctuates what is otherwise black and white imagery. There is a retro quality in Crosby's drawings. In part, this may relate to her use of pen, brush, black and coloured inks. More likely, there is something familiar in her work. Crosby's rich repertoire of marks and influences suggest antique copper-plate engravings, vintage advertisements, popular cartoons and textbook diagrams. Viewers might also be reminded of *Dr. Seuss*, *Curious George*, *Mad Magazine*, drawings by Robert Crumb and any number of other slightly dated pop culture classics.

In Crosby's series *Projecting*, several oversize pairs of heads are shown in profile facing-off against one another. Her previously described *Pinocchio* belongs to this grouping. Hung in a tight grid format, there is an undulating pattern in which one figure does – the other reciprocates – an eye is poked, a mask worn, something is spewed. This game of call and response is echoed by Crosby's use of black and red ink. Another series of drawings called *Maze*, includes some sixty-five heads of various sizes. With only one head per sheet, the head undergoes ever-changing permutations like a flip-book animation

Crosby, *Projecting*, 2016; ink on paper;
56 × 76 cm



sequence splayed across the wall. Details, dot patterns and line transform each head's shape, features and directionality. The basic schema of the face – eyes, ears, nose, mouth – are pushed and pulled, stretched, reconfigured and given new expression with each fresh sheet of paper. Faces frown, scowl, stare, laugh and grimace at each other.

Crosby's heads remind one of a casual doodle pushed to the limit. Her creative approach being, one of action and reaction. A contour line occurs in response to lines made before it. Images form on the page, prompt a new

Crosby, *Extending*, 2016;
ink on paper; each 76 × 56 cm

sequence of marks and inspire a new drawing. Expression and characterization is made when lines converge, attract or repel. One imagines Crosby as constantly drawing and adding more faces to these walls. Gallery space and the inevitable approach of installation day seems the main limiting factor in these projects.

Conan Masterson is a mixed media and textile artist. She summarizes her creative process as “tinkering intuitively with fabric and odds and ends.” Motors, basic electronics, sound and movement are integral components to her work. In the studio, she cannibalizes and repurposes past projects. In this way her installations grow, evolve, live and travel with her. Masterson is fascinated by the weird, the fantastic and the shadows just out of view. Like the monsters that once inhabited the margins of medieval world maps, what scares us, is that which fluctuates between the real and the imaginary. Here for the VAC exhibition, Masterson has re-imagined the “monsters” that have invaded our lakes and rivers with the opening of canals between the Atlantic Ocean and the Great Lakes.

Humans have a primordial fear of snakes. Not surprisingly then, sea-monsters throughout history have taken snake-like characteristics – for a snake that feeds at night and lives in uncertain waters is a fearful thought for most anyone. Old English mythology imagined eels came from the horsehairs that dropped into rivers and ponds. Another belief claimed eels spawned from the dewdrops on reeds. Technically, Lampreys are not actually eels, but are perhaps even more hideous due to their appearance and feeding habits. Lampreys are jawless creatures without fins or scales. They have a mouth ringed with teeth and a tongue that latches onto fish. They lick and suck the flesh from their victims. The scarred bodies of salmon and trout caught in Bowmanville Creek are evidence that these watery monsters are real.



Left:
Crosby, Maze, 2016;
installation view



Right:
Masterson,
Lampricide, 2016;
20 cm tall x 12 cm
diameter



In the side gallery, Masterson presents us two lifeless, fleshy creatures submerged in a glass jar. Is this jar a vitrine that preserves or a snow-globe for shaking? "Do not touch" is the standing order for most galleries, yet the jar's presentation and blue glitter flakes resting in the jar's base suggest otherwise. We are invited to shake the jar but do we dare? Most of us have heard of lampreys, but who has seen them to say if these are real? This is the "yuck" factor created through realism. Uncertainty attracts only to repel.

Humour, surprise and the uncanny are characteristics that mark Masterson's practice. On the third floor of the VAC visitors encounter a sign: "Come close, stomp and shuffle your feet." Stuffed animal "things" sit on the floor, hang on beams and are stuck to walls. Some shiver with subtle vibrations, others are motion and sound activated and growl or shake at gallery visitors. Think of Jim Henson's undersea puppet television show, *Fraggle Rock* from the 1980's. Here in the mill's attic, one almost feels sadness for these little inanimates who perform alone in this cavernous space and await visitors. Who knew lampreys could border on warm and fuzzy fun?

Sarah Ammons is a figurative painter. Mood, mystery and narrative fragments give her works presence. Ammons' use of *Okawara* paper contributes to the tactile quality of each work. This yellowish Japanese paper wrinkles, buckles and carries on it the trace of each erasure and preliminary mark. It is soft, delicate and popularly called "rice paper," although the term is something of a nineteenth century misnomer.

Overall her work in this exhibition might be called "drawing," although water-based paints are used most everywhere. Ammons masterfully plays pattern and contour against flat shape design, perspective and negative space. Notably, in *Who do you think you are/Will be?* contour lines delineate a ceiling fan to capture the object's mechanical qualities. Two views of the



Masterson, *Lampricide*, 2016;
mixed media installation



Ammons, *Who do you think you are/will be?*, 2015; gouache and graphite on Okawara paper; 50 × 40 cm



Ammons, *Language Games*, 2015; gouache and graphite on Okawara paper; 48 × 55 cm

same youthful woman dominate the composition; the woman's stance only slightly shifting and rotating between views. A clock in the background, the work's title and the repeated woman creates a sense of anxiety and waiting.

In *Language Games* the female is again doubled against a singular male. We scan paintings like books; left to right and top to bottom. Doubling the first figure creates a filmic effect. We sense her space, her movements and delay, before we encounter his stillness. The repeated figure across an otherwise continuous picture plane is a convention used throughout art history. It shows the passage of time or sequence of events. Here, figures play backgammon – she makes her move, he waits. The time spent viewing an artwork is influenced by the speed at which a work is made. Pattern, detail, texture



and the urgency in which lines are drawn create mood. The accumulation of lines through drawing takes time. Lines serve as metaphors for time in playing this game of backgammon.

Ammons, *Spirit Quail*, 2016;
gouache and graphite on Okawara
paper; 13 × 30 cm

Spirit Quail is an intimate reflective work without grand gestures. A contemplative girl looks down; a quail stands behind. The work may be a self-portrait but is not identified as such. Floral patterning brings a sense of domesticity and dominates the image; almost to the point of concealing the figure and bird. A window punctures this floral flatness. The window folds the space inward, creates depth and spatial complexity, thus animating the picture's space.

In the painting *Urban Love*, Ammons refers to the *Ovid* myth when asked to describe pictorial details and her motivations behind this work's creation. *Ovid*, like other stories belonging to the old canon of Classics, has become an obscure reference with the passage of time. Centuries ago paintings could be read through identifiable symbols. The inclusion of mythological figures, Classical and Biblical narratives directed viewers to interpret works with certainty and from a predetermined moral vantage. Today painting no longer carries clear messages through prescribed symbols but instead borrows freely from the past and present, popular and high cultures.

Significantly Ammons' balanced undergraduate studio art studies with courses in art history, Classics and philosophy. Art history roots her practice

and informs her technique. The floral motifs in *Spirit Quail* and *Urban Love* resemble wallpaper designs by Pre-Raphaelite artist William Morris. Her figures and use of pattern recalls the influence of Cassatt, Schiele, Vuillard and Degas. *Ovid*, like the wallpaper, is a personal device used to obfuscate narrative. What we encounter through Ammons is narrative fragments, made mysterious by the loss and the remoteness of language, codes and relationships.

To close, a catalogue that follows in the wake of a successful exhibition archives a performative highlight in the creative process. Exhibitions bring celebratory closure to some projects and are platforms for launching new work. They connect artists with one another and introduce new audiences. An exhibition catalogue offers some reflection of the work created and some commentary in regards to the creative processes and its outcomes. Exhibitions are by definition brief, localized affairs. Art and ideas, however, travel farther and circulate longer. Catalogues hopefully support these more distant outcomes. I look forward to seeing the trajectory these young emerging artists next take.

Thank you James Campbell, VAC Director/Curator and the VAC Board of Directors for this curatorial opportunity. Also many thanks to David Gillespie for exhibition installation, Jean-Michel Komarnicki for his photography and Olexander Wlasenko for catalogue editing. Finally, congratulations Dani, Sarah and Conan. ■

Sarah Ammons paints and draws in her studio in Santa Rosa, California. Sarah grew up in Bowmanville and completed her BFA at Queen's University in Kingston in 2012. She then moved to the United States to complete her MFA at the San Francisco Art Institute in 2014. Inspired by daily struggles of love, loss and self analysis, Sarah expresses her reflections in detailed, sensitive drawings and paintings.

Dani Crosby is a graduate of Sheridan College (Bachelor of Illustration). "I seek to visually captivate and emotionally involve my audience using a variety of approaches ranging from complex visual metaphor to linear illustration. My main areas of focus include: fine art, editorial, art for merchandise, posters, logos and icons." Dani resides in Durham Region and teaches art at Durham College.

Conan Masterson invents sculptural installations based on the monstrous and bizarre creatures that lurk in the shadows. From collected tales of the unknown, she creates environments with textiles and electronics, luring the viewer into slightly unnerving surroundings. Conan received a BFA at Concordia University and MFA from the University of Western Ontario in London where she currently resides.

Todd Tremeer is a painter and printmaker; a graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Guelph University (Bachelor of Arts), Brock University (Bachelor of Education) and Western University (Master Fine Art). Todd lives in Bowmanville, teaches at the VAC and is locally known for his murals in town. This is his second curatorial project at the VAC.

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