

North Vancouver artist Emily Neufeld reflects on Canada's colonial history by way of abandoned Prairies farmhouses

Emily Neufeld

Prairie Invasions: A Lullaby,

August 21 – October 18, 2020

Launch: Saturday, August 22, 1:00 - 4:00 PM

Richmond Art Gallery is pleased to present the solo exhibition, *Prairie Invasions: A Lullaby*, by emerging artist Emily Neufeld.



Since 2015 Neufeld has been performing artistic interventions inside houses slated for demolition in the Lower Mainland and abandoned farmhouses across the Canadian Prairies. Within the remnants of these sites, she looks for traces of the lives and histories of those who have once resided there. Neufeld's actions underpin her desire to understand the powers and influences shaping a place and the incremental changes that occur over time.

Neufeld travelled to a dozen farmhouses over the summer of 2018 as part of her research for *Prairie Invasions: A Lullaby*. These are a few of many deserted homes punctuating the Canadian Prairies that were built by settler migrant farmers who came in waves during the 1800s and has ultimately formed part of the complex history of colonization in Canada. As decades passed, many family farms became conglomerates of larger holdings, or farmers retired and then farmhouses were left behind.

Once on-site in one of the six homes selected for this project, Neufeld responded intuitively, performing activities and making sculptures from materials found in the homes and yards. She likens the activities to "funerary rites" which she considers acts of benevolence, such as relocating an empty barn swallow's nest, 'thatching' a roof long opened to the elements with local grasses, or tacking a faded bedroom wall with dozens of native Brown-eyed Susans found near the house.

Born and raised in Alberta, Neufeld's engagement with the Canadian Prairies is genuine. Neufeld's Mennonite great-grandparents arrived in Manitoba in 1874 from the Russian Empire. The Prairies came to be the home of over 21,000 Mennonites who arrived between 1923 and 1930 aided by the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization and the Canadian Pacific Railway.

The exhibition is comprised of photographic documentation of Neufeld's interventions, objects she retrieved from the farms, and purpose-built cylindrical lightboxes.

Neufeld draws a comparison between the "migration of my Mennonite ancestors" and "the displacement of Indigenous peoples, to the European barn swallow that forced other birds out from the land cleared for farms." Neufeld wrests with the attachments and different relationships that Indigenous and Settler peoples have to the land and her roles as Settler, granddaughter and artist. Her title for the exhibition, *Prairie Invasions: A Lullaby*, expresses the tensions of a colonial reality and a sweetness of familial experience residing in her personal memory.

EXHIBITION RELATED EVENTS

PANEL DISCUSSION ON *PRAIRIE INVASIONS: A LULLABY*

Saturday, October 3, 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Exhibiting artist Emily Neufeld joins in a discussion moderated by Curator Nan Capogna with guest panelists Cease Wyss, artist & ethnobotanist, and Amy Norgaard, KPU Farm School Soil Science Instructor.

Panelists will share their insights into themes of local land use, how humans impact the environment and how this relationship with a place informs art-making.

Join in the discussion during this free online webinar.

COST: Free

LOCATION: Online through Zoom

REGISTER: richmondartgallery.org/rahe

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richmondartgallery.org

LOCATION

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12 pm–4:30 pm
Free Admission

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Image: *Prairie Invasions: A Lullaby*, installation detail, 2019, photograph, wall, 148 x 97 x 2 inches. Photograph of sculptural intervention. Courtesy of the artist.