



Kerri Reid & Tyler Brett
Signs of Life

JUNE 27 - JULY 27, 2013

Ghosts in the Rough:

Kerri Reid and Tyler Brett's *Signs of Life*

Signs of Life convenes videos, sculptures, photographs, and drawings by Kerri Reid and Tyler Brett. Kerri Reid's series of videos captures shadows isolated from their source, offering the residue of matter as light-anchored, reeling silhouette. Pertinent to Reid's larger body of work with salvage and restitution, *The End of the World* presents broken objects that Reid found in Dawson City during the season of the midnight sun. Her found materials are hand-erased frame-by-frame, until each ghostly shadow is all that remains to hint at what once was there. Evoking both our investment in materiality and the breakdown of our relationship with objects that have outlived their usefulness, *The End of the World* is disorienting and ethereally arresting—not least because, in exposing the aura of trash, the videos make us vulnerable to the spectral, inhuman plane.

While viewers must assume human intervention in the process of gathering materials and preparing the installation, Reid's videos themselves absent a conscious mover. Instead we see each un-object interacting with an accelerated, 24-hour light—thus we witness the negative reel of corporeality. Unremitting light breeds unrelenting shadow, and the speed at which these shades orbit their lacunae manages to evoke a spectrum of moods: allure, bittersweetness, accusation, and, even, predation.

In displacing objects from context, Reid shows us a void to which only apparitions can acclimatize; inversely, Tyler Brett's *Past the Smuts Grid* injects a human figure into inhospitable landscapes and thus populates the void with a gentle resilience—survivor's grit. Also expressed in silhouette, *Past the Smuts Grid* turns the relationship between landscape, machine, and character into a working play of contours. By crushing the blacks, Brett forgoes the precision of digital videography in favour of a stark, alien texture whereby animate and inanimate inhabitants seem almost etched into a static sky.

This etched quality lends Brett's videos the gravitas of permanence, which allows him to unmoor his *mise en scène* from any anchors in time. The futurist-amid-the-rubble aesthetic that has often informed Brett's work operates here, but *Past the Smuts Grid* lacks the obvious humour of many of Brett's other projects. Indeed, there is a subtle humour, but it reveals itself in context: Brett began shooting on his coffee breaks while working as a carpenter's assistant on the Saskatchewan plain—imagine him, setting

scenes and getting into character, as his pragmatic, hardwearing colleagues look on. The micro-dramas themselves, however, are sombre, and the derelict machinery as well as the desolate sets speak of toil.

The fictional time-space Brett creates is cross-pollinated with the toil of these landscapes' "real lives"—Saskatchewan as farmland, occupied by big crops and big machines, and Iceland as tourist destination cum popular blockbuster backdrop. While Brett's settings may be currently "in use," his quiet repurposing renders familiar surroundings neglected and microcosmic in a way that signals both the impending climax of our present-day way of life and, miraculously, a human capacity to adapt and survive.

Adaptation extends beyond the human here—rocks that wandered off in a tourist's pocket have been surreptitiously replaced with masterful imposters, designed perhaps to plug the gap left by the original's absence. Reid's *Souvenirs* might be read as theft and recompense (certainly the title suggests human materialism); however, Reid again removes herself from the installation itself. Stones and their doppelgangers thus take on a transactional life of their own, somehow operating independently of human interference. Like entangled particles, these twin bodies are superimposed, and one constituent cannot be fully described without considering its other.

Reid nudges us even further into the secret world of living rock by having us consider Karen, a sailing stone and its trail. Now what seems impossible is at last undeniable: these intrepid rocks etch trails into sand without limbed intervention. Karen's disappearance and subsequent rediscovery only deepen the mystery of these stones' mobility and (dare we imagine) motive.

Drawing Karen in carbon dust, Reid brings us full circle, back to a preoccupation with shadow and residue, ephemera and the preservation of what's fleeting. Brett's kinetic sculpture provides the bridge, marrying light and shadow; trash and treasure; improvisation and intention; stasis and movement. Remember learning about potential and kinetic energy? As a child, the dichotomy seemed almost metaphysical: potential energy as a force field of vectors, and kinetic energy as the living force. Before Wi-Fi and cellular technology, we had already contemplated invisible powers, potential vectors running through our bodies in space. These forces of direction and magnitude continue to provide an array of courses to be taken: anything is possible.

— Brecken Hancock, June 2013

BIOGRAPHIES

KERRI REID and **TYLER BRETT** are visual artists originally from British Columbia who both studied at Emily Carr College University of Art and Design in Vancouver. In 2010, Brett invited Reid to the small rural town of Bruno, Saskatchewan, to be the first artist-in-residence in the old bank building he had recently purchased. They ended up getting married and co-directing the Bruno Arts Bank as a thriving arts centre – artist residency/music venue/coffee shop/gallery/mini-museum/record and bookshop/etc – for the next three years. Brett and Reid recently sold the Arts Bank and have relocated back to BC to Sointula, a small fishing village on Malcolm Island that was originally settled by Finnish socialist utopians. ('Sointula' means 'place of harmony' in Finnish.) They are in the process of starting up a new small arts centre that will include an artist residency, venue, and a shop in a shed: The Sointula Art Shed. Brett and Reid also perform Tyler's music as The Department, with recent performances in Reykjavik, in San Francisco at SFMOMA, and in Bruno, Saskatchewan at the Seniors' Friendship Centre for Seniors' Appreciation Day.

BRECKEN HANCOCK's poetry, essays, interviews, and reviews have appeared in Event, CV2, Grain, The Fiddlehead, and Studies in Canadian Literature. She is Reviews Editor for Arc Poetry Magazine and Interviews Editor for Canadian Women in the Literary Arts. *The Art of Plumbing*, her most recent chapbook, is out with above/ground press and her first full-length manuscript of poems, *Broom Broom*, is forthcoming with Coach House Books. She lives and walks dogs in Ottawa.

COVER IMAGES:

(top) Tyler Brett, *Past the Smuts Grid*, still from ongoing video series, 2009-2013.
(bottom) Kerri Reid, *The End of the World*, still from video series, 2011.

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