

Amalie Atkins  
Dana Claxton  
Mike Rollo  
Ian Campbell  
Gerald Saul  
David Garneau

**Saskatchewan Gothic**

Meet in the Middle |  
Stations of Migration and Memory  
Between Art and Film  
Station 5

NPAK/ACCEA: Armenian Center for  
Contemporary Experimental Art  
Yerevan, Armenia July 14-28, 2015

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*Saskatchewan Gothic* represents Station 5 of the larger durational exhibition *Meet in the Middle: Stations of Migration and Memory Between Art and Film*, taking place from 2014 to 2016 in Regina, the Canadian province of Saskatchewan's capital city. *Meet in the Middle* is conceived as a series of way stations connected by common concerns underlying the historical and contemporary dynamics of global migration, memory and trauma—stations that are designed to enable artists and audiences to encounter, intersect, reflect, locate and relocate themselves relative to these experiences. Featured artists include Atom Egoyan (Canada), Berry Hi (Canada), Shirin Neshat (USA), Gerald Saul (Canada) and Mkrtich Tonoyan (Armenia).

The *Saskatchewan Gothic* program situates itself through the concept of the “prairie gothic”—an aesthetic approach in the history of prairie art and literature that has aimed to capture the unique sense of being-in-place that has been part of prairie identity in Canada throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and which persists in new forms into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The popular prairie has primarily been defined by its flat, minimalist landscape, which, like its population, is seen as banal and boring, yet at the same time extreme and unsettling, and strangely unknowable. In Saskatchewan, with its traumatic history of geographical isolation, insulated farming communities, punishing climate, outmigration during the years of the Great Depression, and, until recently, economic stasis, the dark impulse of the gothic sensibility manifests in offbeat and ironic combinations of rural “fairy tale innocence” and “sinister innuendo” that go “way beyond normal.”<sup>1</sup> Filmmakers who have experimented with such forms include Amalie Atkins, Ian Campbell, Mike Rollo and Gerald Saul. However, in recent years, the insights of Aboriginal artists, such as Dana Claxton and David Garneau, have come to remind us that the “prairie gothic” is a decidedly *white settler* perspective, and they further challenge the darkness underlying ‘Saskatchewan prairie identity’ by exposing the destructive if not genocidal aspects of colonial prairie history and white racism—aspects which Atkins, Campbell and Saul have also come to critique in their work. Moreover, as Saskatchewan’s economy has diversified in recent years, and the province opens its doors to the world, the influx of international immigrants, many with their own traumatic backgrounds as refugees and victims of ethnic cleansing and genocide, bring new voices that continue to broaden and deepen definitions of Saskatchewan identity on the prairie horizon.

Thus, in the broader context of *Meet in the Middle*, Regina becomes a cross-cultural meeting ground and the works in Station 5, *Saskatchewan Gothic*, attempt to show how the local connects with transnational realities as a relatively closed region of Canada opens itself to contact with diverse people, their memories and ways of being, and their own traumatic histories and struggles with imperialism, colonialism, racism, belonging and place.

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<sup>1</sup>*Prairie Gothic*, MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK, October 22, 2011-January 22, 2012. See: <http://www.mackenzieartgallery.ca/engage/exhibitions/prairie-gothic>

## PROGRAMME

**Amalie Atkins, *Listening to the Past/Listening to the Future* (2013)**

2min 58sec

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**Dana Claxton, *The Hill* (2004)**

3min 49sec

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**Mike Rollo, *Ghosts and Gravel Roads* (2008)**

15min 53sec

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**Ian Campbell, *The First Engine* (2015)**

6min 31sec

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**Gerald Saul, *Four short films from 25 Short Films in and About Saskatchewan* (1999)**

15min 40sec (excerpt)

**God Daughter(1998)**

3min 50sec

**Dance (1995)**

3min 50sec

**Price Includes Packaging (1998)**

3min 50sec

**Heavy Machinery has Right of Way(1999)**

3min 50sec

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**David Garneau, *Wash Day* (2014)**

3min 12sec

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**Amalie Atkins, *Braid Harvesters* (2013)**

5min 09sec

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AMALIE ATKINS is a multidisciplinary artist who lives and works in Saskatoon, SK. She creates cinematic fables through a blend of film, textiles, installations, performance, and photography, imprinting a fictional world onto to everyday life. Atkins' films have been shown nationally and internationally. Her performances have been presented across Canada at Edgy Women Festival (Montréal), FADO Performance Art Centre (Toronto), the Ottawa Art Gallery (Ottawa) and Struts Gallery (Sackville).

IAN CAMPBELL is a multimedia artist working in digital and analog film, installation and performance. His comedic and experimental short films have been screened across Canada at venues such as Festival Du Nouveau Cinema (Montreal), WNDX (Winnipeg), Antimatter (Victoria), 8Fest (Toronto) and in Europe and the US. His work investigates the nature of places such as the Canadian prairies and coastal British Columbia. He is a graduate of the University of Victoria (BFA 2002) and Concordia University (MFA 2006).

DANA CLAXTON is part of a generation of First Nations artists who employ strategies of contemporary art to address the impact of history on the present. In her work the artist seeks to deconstruct the ways in which images, philosophies and iconographies of First Nations are formed and commodified, both historically and in contemporary mainstream society.

DAVID GARNEAU (Métis) is a painter, curator, and critical arts writer who engages issues of nature, history, masculinity and contemporary Indigenous identities. He is currently working on curatorial and writing projects between Canada and Australia, and is touring *Dear John: Louis David Riel*, a performance piece featuring a Riel sculpture interacting with John A. Macdonald statues across Canada. He lectures nationally and internationally.

MIKE ROLLO is a filmmaker whose work explores alternative approaches to documentary cinema — methods which thematize vanishing cultures and transitional spaces through references to memory, history, religion, autobiography and architecture. He is an instructor of film production at the University of Regina.

GERALD SAUL is a filmmaker and film professor based in Regina. He earned his MFA in film production and studies in 1996 at York University (Toronto). His first feature film, *Wheat Soup* (co-directed in 1987), was also the first locally produced narrative feature film from his home town of Regina.



Amalie Atkins, *Listening to the Past/Listening to the Future* (2013)

## DESCRIPTIONS OF WORKS

***Listening to the Past/Listening to the Future*** (2013) by Amalie Atkins, 2min 58sec

*Listening to the Past/Listening to the Future*, shot during the last days of the longest Saskatchewan winter, features twin sisters, who possess the psychic ability to send transcontinental messages to each other — a coincidence discovered after the shooting of the film. The film suggests a retrieval of knowledge and a form of transcendence, as if something lost or out of view is being returned or experienced anew as an energetic force. When presented as conceived, as an installation, the two 16 mm films are projected opposite one another, further invoking the motif of the relationship between twins.

***The Hill*** (2004) by Dana Claxton, 3min 49sec

An aboriginal woman walks around the parliament buildings in Canada's capital, searching for a way in.

***Ghosts and Gravel Roads*** (2008) by Mike Rollo, 15min 53sec

An inventory of lost memories and places, the sun bleached landscape of Saskatchewan serves as a metaphor for displacement, a framing of emptiness and absence. Traveling to forgotten towns and channeled through old family photographs, the camera catalogs the haunting remnants of the past, frail monuments and communities laid bare, broken under economic collapse. Under the weight of the prairie skies a visceral, personal encounter is revealed in the solace of open space.

***The First Engine*** (2015) by Ian Campbell, 6min 31sec

At the dawn of the 20th century the horse was supplanted by a new means of power. A working mare named Henrietta is startled to find this new invention making itself known across the prairies. Soon it will make its presence felt in a most radical way.

***God Daughter, Dance, Price Includes Packaging, and Heavy Machinery has Right of Way* are excerpted from *25 Short Films in and About Saskatchewan (1995-1999)* by Gerald Saul, 75min**

***God Daughter*** (1998) by Gerald Saul, 3min 30sec

Pixelated in over fifty locations around Regina, this film features my niece and goddaughter Nicole. It was all shot on one hot summer day, driving from one favourite place to another, as much a city tour as a film production, ending with dripping ice cream down the front of the pink taffeta dress that my wife had worn for her high school graduation. With this film, I discovered the important role that including people in creative filmmaking can have on my personal relationships, using my craft as a way to entertain and spend time with otherwise elusive family members.

***Dance***(1995) by Gerald Saul, 3min 30sec

One night I awoke from a dream about watching this film: two dancers, forever embracing under Muybridge's watchful eye, spin their two inch high figures though a summer garden. In my circles, one never purposely copies the work of another; originality is paramount. Disappointment turned to joy when I realized that this was my dream, not someone else's vision. I could make the film with impunity as I would not have to give someone else credit for the ideas I stole from my own dream.

***Price Includes Packaging***(1998) by Gerald Saul, 3min 30sec

How does a side of beef get reduced to steaks, roasts, and hamburger? The camera's more than slightly wavering eye shows us intimate details of the process. In this film, I used my role as a filmmaker to put myself into a situation I'd never been in before. I've known many people who claim that meat processing is a profound and even soul-shattering experience. I suspect that the separation that the camera gave me from the events shielded me from any uncomfortable reaction as it seemed to me to be nothing more than an interesting transformation of shapes, colours and patterns.

***Heavy Machinery has Right ofWay*** (1999) by Gerald Saul, 3min 30sec

In ironic contrast, the steel mill near Regina is also home to numerous wildlife, including some of the only remaining local bison. Once the most powerful species on the prairie landscape, with legendary herds that stretched to the horizon, the no-longer-proud bison now watch trucks of steel through their barbed wire fence.

***Washday***(2014) by David Garneau, 3min 12sec

*Wash Day* features a winter scene in an urban backyard. There is a white table with four metal pails and a clothes line with a few balloons. A clown enters, removes his gloves and hat, strips to the waist, washes his socks and a small stuffed toy bunny. He then attempts to wash an oil-soaked owl. The scene is horrible, sad, tragic-comic. His actions seem absurd, yet necessary; pathetic, yet empathetic. I was thinking of people who clean oil-slicked birds; perhaps, too, of my father then on his death bed.

***Braid Harvesters*** (2013) by Amalie Atkins, 5min 09sec

Set in a desolate landscape, a mother and daughter work together to gather lost braids. The film conveys a tone of loss and longing, of some tragedy past or tragedy yet to come. This film is the first chapter of *We Live on the Edge of Disaster and Imagine We are in a Musical*, an ongoing body of work. While on an artist residency at Open Space (Victoria, BC) I built a small structure, mimicking an improvised beach hut, out of drift wood and fabric to house the film.

Atkins' films, along with installations, are part of the solo exhibition *We Live on the Edge of Disaster and Imagine We Are in a Musical*, currently on view at the College Art Galleries (Saskatoon, SK).

## CURATORS & ORGANIZERS

ELIZABETH MATHESON is a curator and writer. She has developed pioneering approaches to collaborative cross-disciplinary work including the co-founding of Strandline Curatorial Collective. She advises for Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art, Prince Claus Fund, and Victor Pinchuk Foundation and is an active member in the International Association of Art Critics and the International Association of Curators of Contemporary Art.

DR. CHRISTINE RAMSAY is Associate Professor in Film and Media Studies at the University of Regina (Saskatchewan, Canada). Her areas of contribution to research, teaching and public service include Canadian and Saskatchewan cinemas, masculinities in film and popular culture, philosophies of identity, the culture of small cities, and art/film curation.

ÉLISE BEAUDRY-FERLAND is a recent graduate from the University of Regina with a BFA in Film and Video Production, Élise Beaudry-Ferland is originally from Quebec where she studied Theatre at the CEGEP de Saint-Hyacinthe. Élise's student production *Welcome to the Sullivans'* has been screened at two festivals, and she recently collaborated on a short film for the forthcoming Great Saskatchewan Timelapse project.

MKRTICH TONoyAN is an Armenian-based performance and installation artist working in the theory and practice of "Military Art," Artist-in-Residence (University of Regina, 2015-16), and Director of ACOSS (Art Center of Social Studies, Yerevan).

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## **Saskatchewan Gothic**

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## **Meet in the Middle: Stations of Migration and Memory Between Art and Film**

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For more information and detailed contributor bios see:  
[www.mitmproject.info](http://www.mitmproject.info)

STRANDLINE

curatorial collective



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