

# Sinon, l'hiver

by Kristiane Church



*Going Out Top*, 2015, oil on wood panel, 18" x 14"

*Sinon, l'hiver*, an installation by Winnipeg-based artist Erica Mendritzki, uses the visuals and sensations unique to this cold season as a preliminary backdrop. In winter, our perception of colour shifts to compensate for the lack of greenery, orange-yellow light triumphs from street lamps, breath and footprints become visible, flecks of mud and waste speckle the snow. Strange physical sensations occur: skin is at once frozen and burning, limbs become phantom offshoots of the torso, and dexterity is decreased by layers of clothing.

Winter provides new phenomena for aesthetic and conceptual consideration. The destabilizing conditions call forward the awkwardness of the body, and shed light on Mendritzki's own artistic concerns. *Sinon, l'hiver* questions wider issues of female representation, the contemporary female artist

in relation to the canons of art history, language, and the conditional quality of making and looking at art.

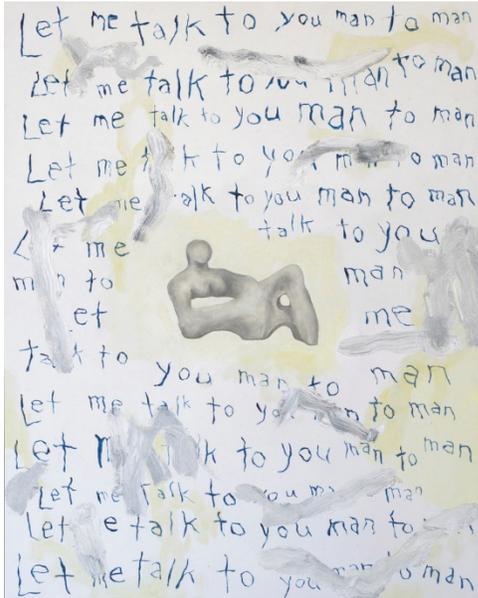
The found objects sprawling the gallery floor, reminiscent of things forgotten under snow, range from junky oddities to bland mass-produced items. These include: beige children's boots placed neatly in a row, smooth black hands holding a peanut shell, a miniature tent, a paper-mâché hand holding an exfoliator, and PVC piping, among others. Some of the items sit alone, others have been stuffed with clay, or into the solid white piping.

The mingling objects, which convey the transference of information and sensations, slow down the viewing process as gallery attendants avoid stepping on them. By forcing the viewer to manoeuvre around their irregular formations, they raise questions of implication and exclusion.

Mendritzki's mottled paintings adopt the colour palette of the trodden winter landscape: greys, black, shades of off-white, sand tones, bright yellows, and an ugly green that is the result of mixing black and yellow paint. These smaller paintings are not grand gestures, their hesitations are apparent. There is a repetition of words, erasures, impressions, ambiguous objects, and body parts. Stylistically they vary from the delicate cursive lines, to the trembling thick scribbles – there is an openness to style akin to Sappho, the Greek lyric poet, who penned the title of the exhibition in one of her poems.

*Going Out Top* (2015) began as an abstract image of lines but became representational through the addition of crudely drawn breasts on the surface of, or showing through, the transparent garment. The painting is an imagination of clothing made for a specific event, but evades projection by confusing

abstract and representational elements. Mendritzki remarks that throughout the history of art, women are portrayed by male artists with their tops falling off spontaneously. In this painting the clothing and the body are two inseparable layers, self-exposing and intact.



*New Contract*, 2015, oil on wood panel, 20" x 16"

A more complex sculptural rendering of the female form shows up in *New Contract* (2015), an ironic homage to Henry Moore's abstract and lumpy reclining women. The phrase "Let me talk to you man to man" conveys the exclusionary tone of art history prior to the 1950s (and still today). Through repetition, the sentence loses context and becomes a pattern of sounds which diverge from the original linguistic meaning. The sentence is made nuanced and absurd, like the gossipy retelling of a story. The shaky words, drawn by the artist's left hand, are stirred exhaustively. Through subversive repetition and projected self-masculinization, albeit the modest plea "let me", Mendritzki deconstructs the sentence and accompanying attitude.

The painting *Bitte, bitte* (2011) depicts two yellow rectangles inscribed *Bitte* on a larger white rectangle. *Bitte*, a German word, commonly translates to "please" and also "you're welcome". The word could be spoken by the person giving or receiving in some sort of exchange. Perhaps the dialogue is broken, short-circuited to loop, or confronts the viewer with a conditional agreement.

Many paintings in *Sinon, l'hiver* appear to depict sheets of paper on which content is performed, often visibly censored or revised. By purposely employing self-masculinizing tactics in humorous, sloppy, and harsh ways, Mendritzki negotiates what it means to create and contextualize work as a contemporary female artist.



*Bitte, bitte*, 2011, oil on canvas, 20" x 16"