

# Marsha Kennedy: Embodied Ecologies

E

*Embodied Ecologies* presents a retrospective survey of the compelling, poetic, political and hauntingly beautiful work of Saskatchewan artist, Marsha Kennedy. Drawn from twenty-five public and private collections throughout Western Canada, this exhibition explores the conceptual

basis and evolution of Kennedy's art practice through multiple bodies of work that engage in concepts pertaining to the body, motherhood, feminism, spirituality, nature, museology, ecology, environmental sustainability, and colonial impacts on the land, spanning the course of Kennedy's impressive and prolific four decade career. This survey brings together over one hundred works in printmaking, painting, mixed media, installation and sculpture to present a richly layered picture of the diversity and yet unifying conceptual threads of Kennedy's practice.

Kennedy's work has consistently engaged in exploring the complex, interconnected relationships between humans and nature and the issues that ensue when this connection is broken and disregarded. While she has worked with varied subject matter and media, with different modes of presentation, and conceptually addressed a range of social, cultural and environmental issues in her ever-evolving practice, essentially Kennedy has remained true to a foundational vision and belief in embodied existence, the intelligence of the natural world and the interconnectedness of all lifeforms. Her work has been steadfast in challenging culturally pervading philosophies that separate mind from body, culture from nature and spirit from matter, as well as challenging the domestication and degradation of nature in the pursuit of regional and global colonization and commerce. From the experimentation of her student days to her current explorations, Kennedy's messages regarding feminist, sociopolitical and environmental issues have always found their inspiration in personal experience, which then delves her into research and the studio. She draws from her experiences, as a woman, feminist, activist, mother, and an environmentally-conscious and concerned citizen, to engage in the politics of body, land and place through visual and poetic provocation.

Kennedy emerged as an artist in the late 1970s and early 1980s, during the postmodern art era which embraced, as it applies to her work, personal narrative, feminist art, text-based works and a return to figuration. With a start in printmaking, experimentations with installation and mixed media works, and then predominantly working in painting, her figurative work includes self-portraiture, literal, symbolic and metaphorical representations of the human body, as well as depictions of animal and plant species. These figures have often been isolated and decontextualized, presented on dark or gold-leafed grounds, within imagined landscapes or domestic spaces, as icons, symbols or specimens. Birds have been a frequent and recurring subject matter in her work, a species that has been heavily impacted by human progress, becoming symbols of the fragility of life and our ecosystems. The inclusion of text, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s, adds to the conceptual richness, poetry and layered meaning of Kennedy's work. Etched words and phrases on glass are overlaid over painted images, bodies are imprinted with diagrams and maps, text is embedded within her surfaces or introduced as a sculptural element within installations. Layered imagery and concepts are also found in presentations of multiple canvases, as in the series *Face in the Clouds* or *Upon My Lap the World is at Play*, as well as in more recent bodies of work where Kennedy stages and montages photographic compositions which are then transformed through paint.

This survey of the career of Marsha Kennedy highlights the contributions of her work towards contemporary painting and feminist and environmental art in Canada, as well as reflecting on her impact on the broader arts community. Having taught in the visual arts, first in Ontario and then at the University of Regina for two and a half decades, while also serving as a mentor to emerging artists, she has influenced generations of artists and has contributed a strong and unique voice within Canadian contemporary art.

Jennifer McRorie, Curator; Organized by the Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery, in partnership with the Art Gallery of Swift Current, Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat, AB, and Vernon Public Art Gallery, Vernon, BC.

Funding assistance is provided by the Government of Canada, Canadian Heritage, SK Arts, Saskatchewan Lotteries, SaskCulture, and the City of Moose Jaw.