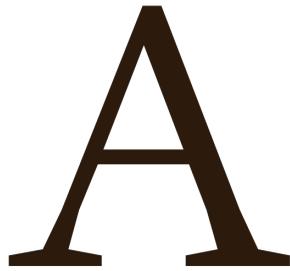


# The Wide Web of the World



After completing the *Mapping the Land and Body* series in 2004, Marsha Kennedy changed her approach from working large-scale to creating arrangements of small, intimate works. Casting her gaze on a larger, global scale, she began sourcing her subject matter through infinite sources available on the internet to investigate the images and information we are daily exposed to that informs our world views and belief and value systems. Here, as in past work, Kennedy is questioning where we place our values, what drives our thinking and behaviours, and where we find cultural meaning.

One project that emerged during this period was the series, *Face in the Clouds* (2005)<sup>i</sup>, consisting of thirty exquisite, miniature paintings framed by gold leaf. Featured in this exhibition as a smaller sampling, the series offer a myriad of cropped images: fragments of earthly and cosmic skies, swelling seas, forest fires, icebergs and drapery, all sourced from art historical seascapes and religious paintings, as well as mass media images. On first glimpse, these images present as beautifully rendered landscapes and details of renaissance or classical paintings, but on closer inspection, the images and titles reveal that amongst these transcendent compositions, there are tragedies at play. Countering the tragedy, there are also images of intense beauty, cosmic splendor, the fantastical and religious inspiration. Kennedy explains that these images share a very temporal existence, representing forms and energies that are in transition. “It is this lack of a distinct and fixed structure that stimulates a perceptual response known as pareidolia.”<sup>ii</sup>

Pareidolia is described as a type of illusion, a common neurological and psychological occurrence, where the brain interprets vague images as clear or distinct ones, often as a face. Kennedy explains that pareidolia “has been used to explain many religious and nonreligious apparitions, visions and sightings. A vision of Satan in the smoke of the Trade Center Towers on September 11th [and] the face of Jesus seen in the Eagle nebula are . . . examples of pareidolia.”<sup>iii</sup> She notes that a similar response, called apophenia, is the perception of connections between unrelated events. Futuristic and religious prophecies and many other supernatural phenomena have been attributed to apophenia. While Kennedy’s individual images are seemingly unrelated and without context, together as a compilation of images, they reflect some of western culture’s hopes, dreams and beliefs, along with our deepest fears and tragedies. Kennedy encourages viewers to draw meaning from the associative connections, and in doing so, “plays with the prophetic messages, codes, myths and

symbols that dominate much of popular western culture and shape, not only our world view, but our reality.”<sup>iv</sup>

A second project that emerged during this period was the series *Upon My Lap the World is at Play* (2010), presenting diptychs and triptychs of small-scale paintings.<sup>v</sup> The title of the exhibit references Kennedy’s access to the world through her laptop when researching global issues. It also alludes to the range of sources that the artist used in the creation of the image arrangements, from the personal, with images of people and objects from Kennedy’s own domestic world, to the international, with images of political unrest, environmental devastation and animal rights violations. Many of the images gleaned from national and international sources present challenging and troubling subject matter. Kennedy edits these images compositionally, presenting them as fragments and without context. Her juxtaposition of these images with those from her domestic world speaks to the statement, “the personal is political”, underscoring the connections between personal experience and larger social and political structures.<sup>vi</sup> The images in their compilations, Kennedy suggests, take on a didactic nature, much like the purpose of Illuminated manuscripts, “point[ing] to something of greater significance associated with religious, spiritual, cultural or economic meaning and worth. The reference to illuminated manuscripts is suggested in the miniature scale and the application of gold leaf. Historical manuscripts recorded both liturgical and secular themes and were created to convey important lessons. Today, they provide insight into the cultural rites, objects, habits, beliefs and events of the past.”<sup>vii</sup> Presented in this exhibition as a smaller sampling of the original series, these works represent the contemporary values, habits and events of our present, from the global to the personal, perhaps questioning how we interpret the inundation of images and information from around the globe that we receive through our digital platforms in relation to our daily lives and what roles we can play to personally affect social change. They also address Kennedy’s ongoing concerns for the environment and the protection of natural species globally, looking at the atrocities that humanity inflicts on the earth and her creatures and how these impacts will, in turn, impact us.

During this period of time, Kennedy’s work was included in an exhibition, curated by Patricia Deadman, at the MacKenzie Art Gallery in 2004, titled *Domestic Arts*, as well as a permanent collection exhibition there in 2006, titled *Da Vinci’s Shadow: The High Realist Legacy in Canadian Art*, positioning her work within a national context, alongside artists such as Alex Colville and Mary Pratt. Kennedy also began curating and presenting themed art exhibitions locally and regionally, supporting the practices of other Regina artists and recent University of Regina BFA graduates.

<sup>i</sup>Marsha Kennedy exhibited this series in 2005 at the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina, as part of a University of Regina faculty show, titled *Site Reading*, which was guest curated by Seema Goel.

<sup>ii</sup>Marsha Kennedy, Artist statement for *Face in the Clouds* series, *Site Reading* (2005), MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK.

<sup>iii</sup>Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup>Ibid.

<sup>v</sup>This series was exhibited in a solo exhibition, *Upon My Lap the World is at Play* (2010), Mysteria Gallery, Regina, SK.

<sup>vi</sup>The personal is political is a political argument used as a rallying slogan of student movement and second-wave feminism from the late 1960s. Sourced from Wikipedia, *The personal is political*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_personal\\_is\\_political](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_personal_is_political), accessed on August 25, 2020.

<sup>vii</sup>Marsha, Kennedy, Artist statement, *Upon My Lap the World is at Play* (2010), Mysteria Gallery, Regina, SK.