

# arts



Tracy Peters' Shed Root

# New growth

Two exhibitions of female artists explore natural cycles and human impact



Uproot by Tracy Peters



Lateral Symmetry 6

By Steven Leyden Cochrane

FOR two years, Tracy Peters has watched natural and human cycles play out from a unique vantage point at the city's edge. In that time, an abandoned, century-old grain shed in Charleswood has been her studio, her subject, and a work of art itself. *SHED Unusual Migration*, which opened at Aceartinc. last Friday, marks a sombre, reflective coda to the project.

Peters first printed enormous photographs of the forest floor on translucent vellum, slicing them into ribbons that she wove through the shed's wooden slats and left exposed to wind and rain. She documented the changing light and listless accumulation of golden-tufted foxtail barley seeds blown in from an adjacent field, photos and footage that would become the raw material for austere and beautiful installations and video works.

In a reversed, time-lapsed video, the ribbons slither and flap on a stormy day, making the shed seem unnervingly alive. Another projection deftly exploits gallery architecture to animate a dramatic interior view: blinding sunlight streams into the darkened shed through gaps between the boards while the door swings open and shut with the impact of a solar eclipse. A spotlit tangle of shredded photographs installed at ceiling height mimics the swallows' nests Peter found at the site, while a patch of sunlight — actually another clever and impossibly subtle projection — glides almost imperceptibly across the gallery floor.

I was able to visit the shed itself several times last summer when it was a living space, foxtails eddying, grasshoppers jumping, the handiwork of swallows everywhere, vellum strips fluttering in the wind. Brought into the gallery, the creased ribbons hang limply, torn pieces removed to create a single, undifferentiated curtain like an abstract canvas or hunting blind.

Ghostlike, the videos flicker and the patch of light shuffles back and forth. The mood is eerie with a note of bitterness, elegiac but terse: the shed is still standing, but the site is slated for development.

Themes of change, succession, and our shifting relationship with nature carry over (along with a few stray foxtails) to an exhibition that opened the previous night at Brandon's Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba.

Curated by Natalia Lebedinskaia in tandem with a survey of work by the late Rosemary Kowalsky, *Lateral Symmetry* brings together four female

## Tracy Peters: SHED Unusual Migration

ACEARTINC.

- 290 McDermot Ave.
- Until Oct. 7

## Lateral Symmetry

ART GALLERY OF SOUTHWESTERN MANITOBA

- 710 Rosser Ave., Brandon
- Until Oct. 25

### ART REVIEW

artists from Manitoba (including Peters) whose works poetically reflect on of cycles of decay and new growth.

In Brandon, Peters fills a vitrine with a luminous cloud of foxtail seeds, which reappear in a sweeping row of "portraits," lumen prints resembling lustrous, gold-toned X-rays. Other vitrines house relics from Elvira Finnigan's ongoing *Saltwatch* experiments, including *Feast* and *Aftermath*, which she staged last year at the Centre culturel franco-manitobain.

Successive baths of super-saturated brine coat plates of picked-over fish and table scraps with a bloom of greyish salt, while goblets overflow with rust-coloured, crystalline foam. Like baroque still life paintings of rotting fruit, Finnigan's objects are preserved in a state of decay, glittering reminders of mortality and waste.

Three immense photographs by Sarah Ciurysek reveal the exposed face of a pit or trench in the earth, a textural expanse of compressed soil and trailing roots recalling an archeological dig or open grave. A thin line of grass barely visible at the top, the Tyvek scrolls curl at the bottom where they meet the floor, suggesting further unseen depths.

Brandon-based artist Basma Kavanagh (also a poet currently up for the CBC Poetry Prize) shifts the focus to new growth, crafting delicate, organic forms from paper and silk cocoons and populating the gallery with an expanding colony of ceramic vessels. Fairy rings of white pinch-pots will spread across the gallery before eventually being left in the woods to provide homes and nests for woodland creatures, and — who knows — maybe surprise some future archeologist.

Steven Leyden Cochrane is a Winnipeg-based artist, writer and educator.