

Tracy Peters's
SHED

A RESPONSE BY MARY REID

28 JUNE 2012 [PART I, OFF-SITE, CHARLESWOOD]

26 OCTOBER 2012

[PART II, OFF-SITE, 92 ALBERT STREET]

Towards the end of May 2012, I was invited to partake in this anthology. The request was to write a response about a new body of work by Tracy Peters. However, it was a project that was only at the beginning stages of conception for the artist. Over the last several years, Peters's artistic practice has developed and matured exponentially and I was intrigued to observe where this ambitious trajectory would take her. As an eager witness to her process, what follows is a series of transcribed notes from our various meetings.

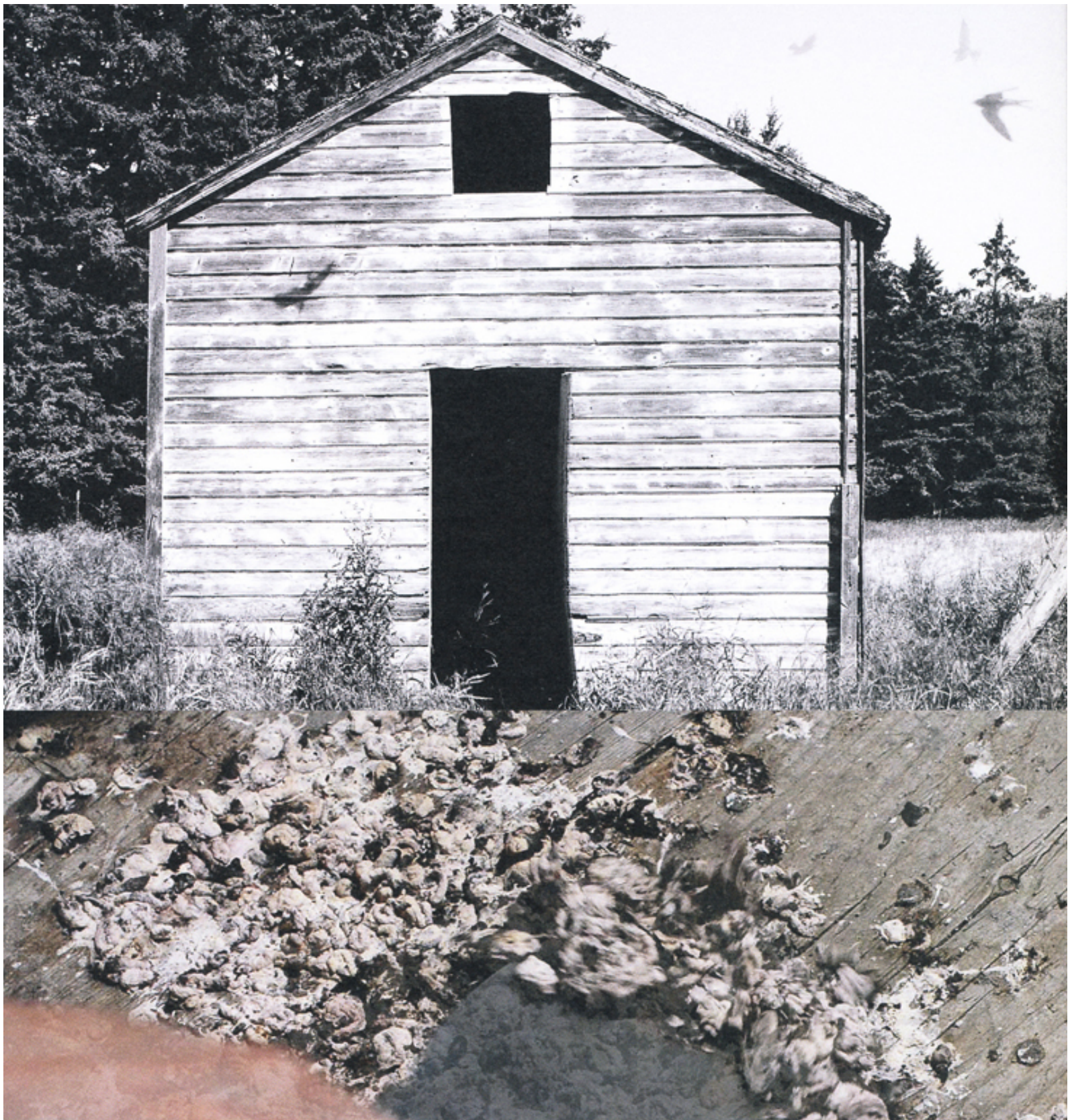
**FIRST VISIT: 28 JUNE 2012,
APPROXIMATELY 7:30 PM**

It is a long and glorious prairie summer evening. Having driven through a circa-1940s suburban neighbourhood, I arrive at a homestead located on the edge of Winnipeg's city limits. On this semi-rural plot of land, the former residents (who were market gardeners) raised a family of nine children in a modest tar-paper house. A stone's throw away from this now dilapidated wreck is its accompanying and largely intact shed—the focus of Peters's latest project.

Interested in the textures of the surrounding fields and forests throughout

the seasons, Peters considers this unremarkable building a living document. It was once used for many functions—some apparent, such as storing grain; and some completely unknown. The shed's exterior was painted, but is now worn and peeling; evidence of age and vulnerability to the elements. In its interior, the milled wood stamped "Kamloops" is still visible. Numerous holes in the wooden planks on the walls and roof animate the dark space with little spots of light. Full of foxtail seeds in the corners and between the boards, it shelters all kinds of wildlife ranging from birds to raccoons and skunks, whose traces of habitation, unpleasant or otherwise, are evident.

Over the years, Peters has witnessed how the surrounding fallow lands have quickly transformed. In this case, foxtail barley, which is a native plant but behaves in a similar manner as an invasive species, moves in. Strong winds distribute their fluffy, spider-like seeds everywhere. A silent sentinel, this unremarkable little wooden structure now sits in the centre of a major housing development, where 2400 to 4000 houses will take over the surrounding agricultural fields. Peters is struck by the invasive, prolific, unstoppable, cataclysmic,



interspecies competition parallel between foxtail barley and the demand for suburban living.

Throughout the coming months, Peters will observe, listen, and meditate, using all her senses to experience and understand this interior space and exterior environment. Plans to visit the shed daily, sometimes numerous times, even to sleep in or nearby are discussed. Through various modes of image capturing such as digital photography, lumen printing, and video, Peters wants to mine and transfer the information embodied in the shed and reimagine and reconstruct this living document into a site-specific installation in her studio, located in the core of the city.

**SECOND VISIT: 26 AUGUST 2012,
APPROXIMATELY 6:00 PM**

Peters has been busy creating several interventions on the exterior surface of the shed. Earlier in April, she took a photograph of the nearby forest floor where the foxtail seeds were blending with dead leaves and branches and starting to rot. From this image, she had a large 8½-foot-long double-sided print on vellum produced. Inside the shed, Peters then cut this print into strips and wove them in a formal grid

pattern through the slatted walls of the shed. This process was not easy, as she had to force the strips through by hacking away with a jigsaw to create enough space to weave the strips in and out. Exposed to the hot dry summer weather, over time the vellum strips began to take on the appearance of stone. Grasshoppers have been nibbling away the edges. Here there is a co-relation between the subject of the image and the shed itself, both in a state of being recycled back into nature. With this transformation is the potential for new growth.

A duplicate print of the forest-floor image, this time on a 4-foot-long piece of vellum (and printed on only one side), has been wetted and then moulded onto another exterior side of the shed. When wet, the vellum stretches and then gradually shrinks when dry. Appearing akin to a skin, the image takes on the texture of faded paint.

In the shed itself, projected onto a piece of old weathered plywood, Peters screens several in-progress videos. *Layers* makes the most impact, perhaps because it taps into my own nostalgia and memory. In this work, the shed becomes a supersized birdhouse, where ghostly barn swallows swoop and swirl, in and around. This is followed by a



41

close-up image of the artist scraping bird droppings off the floor with a large trowel. The overall colour is monochromatic grey. The sound shifts between the sweet tweets of the birds and the aggressive, aggravating noise of the scraping. The entire piece then loops. Through its repetition, the fleeting romance of the birds is punctuated with the unpleasant act of cleaning up their scat, and it is this simultaneous attraction and repulsion that makes this video so mesmerizing.

In the detritus discarded in the tall grass that surrounds the shed, Peters has found a fortunate gift — one pane of glass approximately 8"×10", remarkably still intact. Peters puts it to use to create a series of lumen prints titled *Clusters*. A very early form of photography, which is dependent on photosensitive paper and available sunlight, these 1:1 images react to humidity, dust, blowing grass, and shadows, and take from two to five hours to create. The results,



42

although contemporary, appear historical, and again make another linkage to various concepts the shed symbolizes.

**STUDIO VISIT: 20 OCTOBER 2012,
APPROXIMATELY 1:30 PM**

Four months have passed. It is now chilly but the snow has yet to come. I take the elevator up to Tracy Peters's studio, located in Winnipeg's Exchange District. Her material tests, installation experiments, image-capturing research, and raw sound data have been removed, collected, and transplanted to this sheltered yet confined space for further play and investigation. Upon entering, the first work encountered is *Shed/Transplant*. The 'sculpture' rests on a shredded nest of printed paper, and is primarily comprised of a Sonotube covered with an orderly crisscross of matte digital prints. Using scissors, Peters painstakingly cut thin slices from one of the previously woven vellum strips to create the bed



43

of paper. The bark of digital images is comprised of close-ups of the weathered plywood planks that lined the interior of the shed. Tree-like in its vertical nature and composed of paper-based material, the crisscrossing of images references not only the way plywood is constructed but also the troubling aspects about this mass-produced building material. The plywood planks provided extra strength for the shed and likely were a reason why it has remained standing all these years. However, the demand for plywood (and paper) is directly related to the problems of deforestation. *Shed/Transplant* alludes to a future type of forest—wholly constructed, recycled, and reconstituted by humankind.

In the adjacent corner is *Unusual Migration*, where the balance of the woven



44

strips has now been reassembled in a web configuration. Having maintained the crimping shape from the earlier weaving, the ribbons of vellum appear as if they are snaking out of Peters's studio walls. The orientation in the corner recalls the piles of foxtails that collected in the corners of the shed—an infestation of another sort.

The doors in her studio are also implicated in this installation. *Seep* is sourced from the mould on the shed (another form of invasion) that Peters documented in close-up. Using rice-paper photo transfers, she has covered the windows of one door, mimicking the slats of the shed's walls. Temporary; impermanent; the papers have already begun to peel away from the door. This concept of 'second skin' is picked up again on the other door in the far

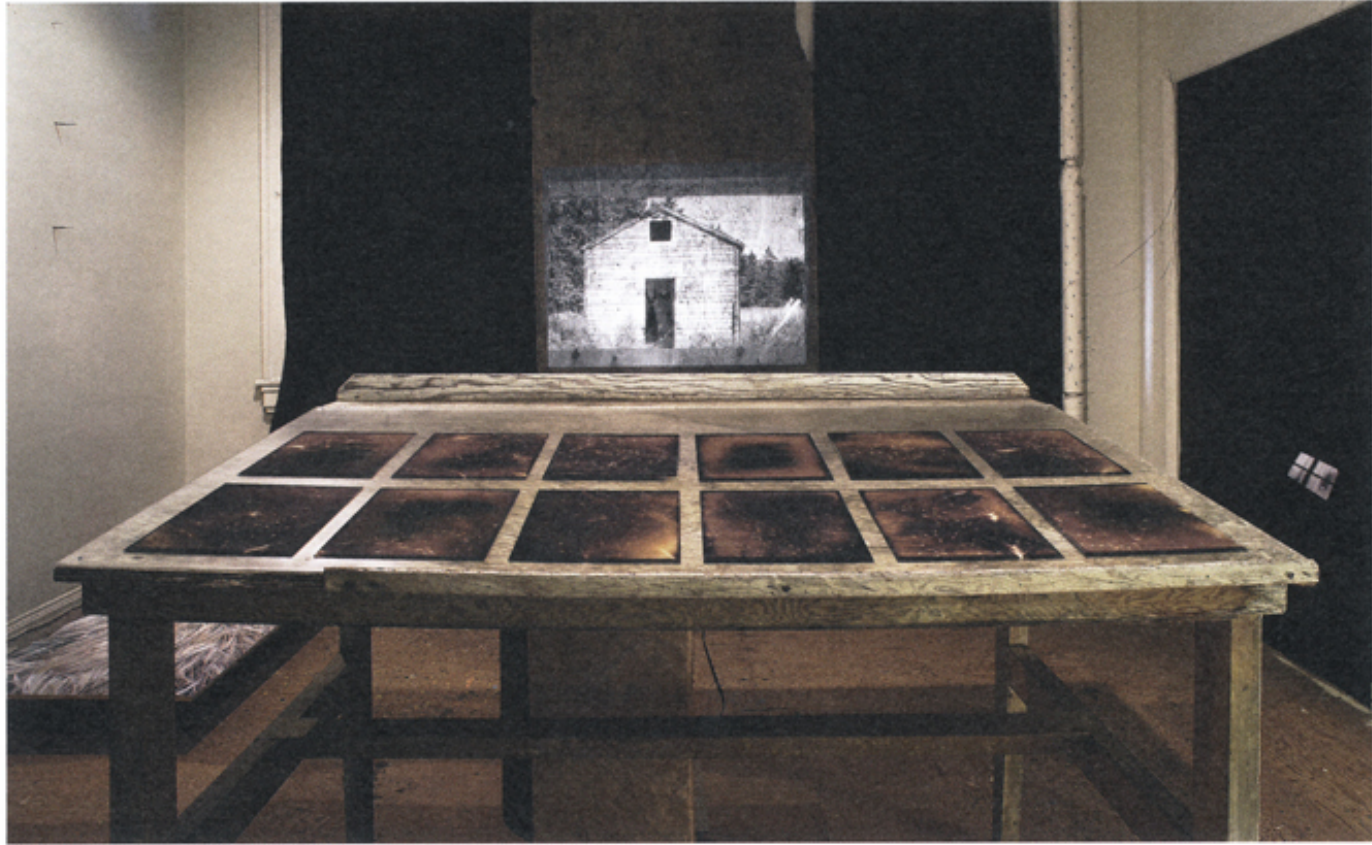


45

corner of the room. Titled *Liminal Space*, a 'recreated' photograph of the dark interior of the shed fills the entire doorframe. Black fabric mimics the shed's dark interior, while towards the bottom right is a collaged, cropped image of the light from the small window, crawling across the floor, tracing the movement of the sun. This reinvention creates an illusion and suggests that the space beyond us is deeply infinite, akin to the passage of time and remembering.

**OPEN STUDIO: 26 OCTOBER 2012,
APPROXIMATELY 5:00 PM**

Stepping into Peters's modest studio once again, I am confronted with the shed (although represented in fractured bits) now wholly transformed. The life cycle of the building has taken an unexpected twist—its embedded history and the deciding forces of its existence have become fodder for this installation that laments the vanishing rural prairie. The summer of 2012 is likely one of the last for the shed and its surrounding foxtails. The impending future will see the small building levelled or moved and a brand new cookie-cutter home placed in its stead. Peters plans to continue her engagement with the shed for as long as possible, exploring ways for her photographic interventions to fully collaborate with the environment. However, regardless of what the future holds for this unassuming, simple structure, its legacy as a historical document, a marker of a time lived and passed, a purpose once necessary and now obsolete, has been recorded, reconsidered, and reconstructed in Tracy Peters's installation.



46